The Big Horn Treasure

Vaughan W. Rice

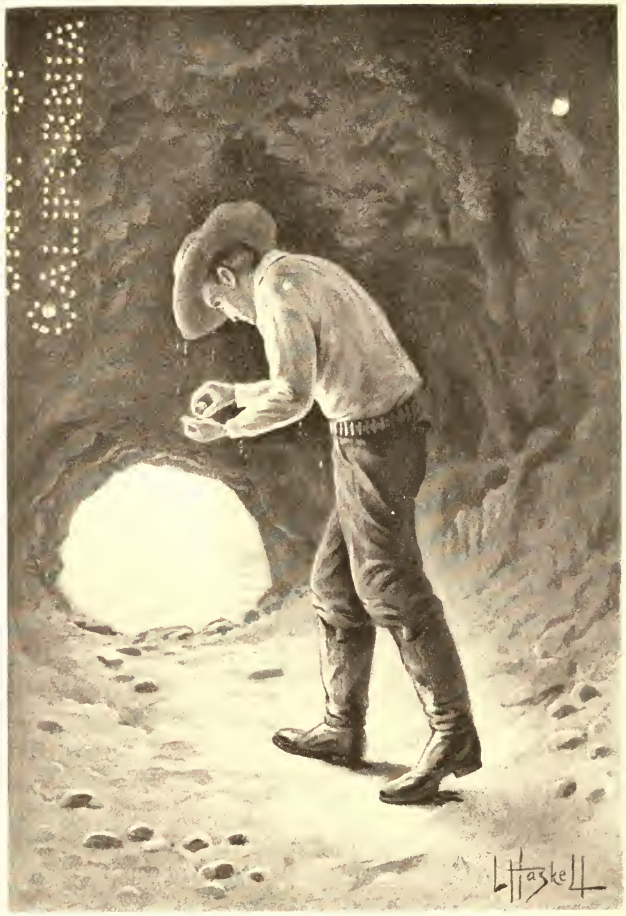
From Victor

to

W. W. Rice

June 4th 98

THE BIG-HORN TREASURE



"It's a nugget! Solid gold!"

THE
BIG-HORN TREASURE

A TALE OF
ROCKY MOUNTAIN ADVENTURE

BY
JOHN F. CARGILL

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THE BIG-HORN TREASURE.

CHAPTER I.

THE FLASH MESSAGE.

"If you have any opinion to offer on this situation, Ken, I 'm willing to listen, but my legs are telling me that I can hear better sitting than standing. Let 's breathe."

Without waiting for a response the speaker threw himself upon the ground. "Ah!" he ejaculated, with a long deep sigh of pleasure, "Was n't that a climb, though? This rest is all the happiness I shall require for a few minutes."

He was a manly looking fellow of about seventeen or eighteen years, and his remarks were addressed to another young man, who, in appearance, seemed a year or two older.

"I think I 'll join you, Phil," he replied, as he took possession of a smooth rock by his side. "Sancho won't object, I venture to say." There came another great sigh of relief, the exact counterpart of the one his companion had given

forth, and for a few minutes neither of the young men spoke again, giving themselves up to perfect inaction and a dreamy contemplation of the landscape.

The third member of the party, to whom Ken had referred as "Sancho," was a Mexican donkey, or burro, bearing a pack about as large — but possibly not quite as heavy — as himself.

The three together made up a group which, taken in connection with their surroundings, would have been thought unusually picturesque, if not astonishing, could it have been viewed by a person unaccustomed to such things.

The most noteworthy feature was the situation. This was the rocky and broken summit of a high mountain, which towered above everything else around; and the young men were looking down upon and across scores of peaks, many of which, taken by themselves, were mountains of consequence.

In fact, the three living figures and bundle of chattels overtopped the last and uppermost of what had seemed to them, upon approach, to be a tremendous heap of porphyry rocks of irregular and confused shapes, as though thrown and left there by some convulsion.

This appearance, though, was not in all respects real; for the young men, as they neared

the top, had noted — because they were especially interested in observing geological formations — that the rocks, although twisted by former volcanic action, still, for the most part, held to their natural place.

From where they sat they could see that they were upon the apex of a great bisected cone which had only a slight width at the top and sloped sharply toward the west, and that the whole upper half of the east face was as sheer and smooth as though some Titan had hewn it with his mighty ax.

The party not merely seemed to overhang, but during the last few hundred feet of their advance the sensation had been almost that of floating above, depths so remote that objects underneath them could not be distinguished in the dim distance, and the things nearest within their reach were the vaporous clouds, which, as they scudded past, tended to create the dreadful feeling of toppling over into nothingness.

They knew that with only one little stammering step their darting flight through the underlying blue and shadowy horror, and into the hereafter, would outdo the eagle in swiftness; and yet they had been neither giddy nor afraid, for such experiences were not new to them.

As the senses of our two adventurers became gradually freed from the strain of weariness, they awoke to the grandeur of the scene before them.

With one circular sweep their eyes encompassed nearly the entire mountain region of western Colorado. Both of them were accustomed to rugged scenery, but their natures were too fine ever to become dulled to the wonders of a prospect such as this.

The mountain peaks seemed as numberless as the stars, but with another and a greater glory — a glory of tint and luster which no language could express or poet ever sing. From the dazzling sheen of the summer sun upon snow-capped summits, ranging through pearl-gray, opalescent, amethyst, and ruby-colored masses, thrown into astonishing contrasts and delicious blendings by the haziness over the valleys, the iridescence of forest-tops, the flying cloud, the distant shower of rain, and the deep black shade of cañon or basin.

To the eastward the Saguache Mountains, abruptly shutting off the plains, lessened the expanse to about fifty miles. But, north, south, and west, the distances seemed to be without measure or bound. In the south, the ragged and dark San Juan Range; more westerly, the Un-

compahgre group; while in the extreme west, blending with blue sky and purple haze,

"Far, vague, and dim,"

the Wahsatch Range of Utah, distant more than two hundred miles, and floating in mid-air, suggested to Ken the lines of "Drifting."

North and northwest, the view, stretching to the border of Wyoming and beyond, embraced, besides a wilderness of mountains in groups and singly, wide spaces of brown and amber tableland with scant vegetation.

Long they gazed in silence, with rapturous half-intoxicated senses, and with but small consciousness of feature or outline.

But at length their eyes came wandering back from the dim distance to the details of objects nearer at hand.

Here were valleys which the crystal atmosphere rendered clear in all their fullness: numerous waterfalls glittering like threads of spun glass, and small lakes which mirrored the green of forest and the rose-color of overhanging precipice.

Nearly two thousand feet beneath them on the west side was the divide between two rivers: one flowing south to the Gunnison, the other northward to the Grand, the waters of which were to

finally meet in their rush through the dark, mysterious Cañon of the Colorado. The northerly stream received its first impulse from the snows of a high peak just across the intervening gulch, which seemed to be within stone's-throw, but was actually four miles away, in a straight line.

From beneath the glistening snow-bank the new-born stream plunged down the mountain in a series of hardy leaps, until it reached a level shelf or bench of perhaps forty or fifty acres in extent, perched about midway above the valley.

On this lofty platform, apparently safe from the intrusion of any living creature without wings, was a lovely small lake surrounded by the verdure of mountain shrubbery and grass.

Suddenly, Phil, whose eyes had for some time been directed toward this portion of the scene, broke the silence, exclaiming:

"Good gracious, Ken! look here! Do you see the shelf in the side of the cliff over yonder?"

"You mean the one that has the lake, and looks like a balcony with a jardinière on it?" asked Ken.

"Yes, that 's it," replied Phil eagerly. "Now look along the left side. Do you see two white spots against the green of the bushes?"

"Well! Of all marvelous things, that's the

greatest." murmured Ken in low-voiced astonishment. "Is it possible they are tents?"

"Good enough!" cried Phil in an excited but somewhat relieved tone. "I was n't able to fully trust my own eyes, but since you see them, it 's settled. Yes, they are tents. Say, where 's the glass?" He sprang to his feet, and running to the burro, fumbled a moment inside a leather pouch which was strapped outside the pack; then quickly returned with a telescope.

Hastily adjusting it, he leveled it across Ken's shoulder and took a quick alignment and sight. Then he shouted, "A pair of jacks! Hold on a minute — I believe — yes, as sure as you 're a living man, it 's Neal McInnis. I know him by his stride and by his white duck trousers."

"Oh! say, Phil!" exclaimed Ken, "I think your imagination is getting the better of you. The idea of there being a man and two burros in that place! Why, it 's fully twelve or fifteen hundred feet above the basin, and upwards of a thousand feet below the summit. It would seem about as reasonable to talk about seeing them bowling along on top of that cloud yonder."

"All right," laughed Phil. "Here, take the glass and look for yourself. You saw the tents, did n't you? I 've no more idea how they got there than you have, but there they are, as snug

and cozy as you please. It 's our boys' camp, and we have got to find the way to it before dark to-night, or Sancho won't have much chance to break his fast. There 's hardly enough for a grasshopper to eat anywhere on this mountain."

While Phil was talking, Ken, with the glass leveled over Phil's shoulder, was making a careful scrutiny of the objects under discussion. At length he said, "It 's surely a camp; tents, burros, man and all. I believe you are right too, about it 's being McInnis. But do you suppose there is another man upon earth besides that Scotchman who would climb up to such a place as that to prospect for a mine? And where do you suppose Dave is?"

"He can't be very far away," replied Phil, "for the reason that he could n't get away, apparently, without falling off the shelf. Say, Ken, I 'll try to call him, if you agree to wait a little while and help me."

"Call him! Wait for you! What in the world are you talking about, Phil?"

"Do you remember the helioscope that Dave and I made and used to experiment with? Well, I have it right here. I smuggled it into the pack along with my clothes. You see it does n't take up any great room, or weigh much," Phil added by way of apology, "and Dave and I

talked it over and agreed to take them along with us. We thought they might come into good use. Dave has the mate to it over yonder, and this is as good a chance as we could possibly ask to find out whether or not they are of any value."

Ken glanced up at the sun, took out his watch, and then said:

"Well, it 's not quite twelve o'clock. Neal has probably just come from the place where they are at work, and is now getting dinner. This is a good time to try it on, and if you can manage to communicate with the boys over there by means of it, I will forgive you for making Sancho tote it without my knowledge. I have n't very much faith in the thing, though."

"Well, Ken, I would n't have brought it, and I would n't ask to try it now, if I were not confident of what can be done with it. I will either make Dave tell us how to reach their perch, or throw the apparatus down into the basin here. Come, we will have to undo the pack."

The "pack"— which was a large, shapeless bundle done up in a piece of light duck — was hastily undone, and lifted from Sancho's back to the ground.

Spreading it open, Phil selected a flour-sack, which contained his own personal belongings,

and, quickly untying the string, thrust in his arm. After a moment's fumbling he drew out a woolen shirt, and, unrolling it, brought to view a small, flat, wooden box. Opening this he took out a number of articles or pieces which might have puzzled any one but himself to state their use.

"Please hand me the telescope, Ken," he said.

Taking the glass, he selected two pieces from his box that were exactly alike, and fastened them to the telescope by means of clamps and set-screws, with which they were fitted. Both pieces he fixed to one side of the glass, one near the object end, the other several inches farther back, and exactly in line with each other. These were simply round pasteboard disks about four inches in breadth, with a hole in the center about an inch in diameter.

Then he took a small mirror about two inches broad, also fitted with clamps, and with a swivel arrangement so that it could be moved in any direction. This he fastened nearest to the eye-piece of the telescope, and also exactly in line with the two disks. The mirror had a very small space in its center, from which the quicksilver had been scraped, enabling one to peep from the back of the mirror through the holes in both disks.

Lastly, he fastened another clamp to the cen-

ter and under side of the telescope, to which was attached, by a swivel with an up-and-down movement, a round brass pin that fitted into a socket in a flat block of wood. This served as a standard.

"There," said Phil, "that's all there is to it. Do you think I can talk to Dave with the thing?"

"I have heard of something of the sort, and I 'm sure you have my best and most earnest wishes," replied Ken, "but I do not by any means feel sure of it."

"Dave and I have tried it before, although never at such long range as this. It will work though, I promise you," said Phil confidently.

Phil then placed his instrument upon a flat, smooth rock and pointed it carefully toward the distant tents. After sighting and focusing the telescope, he next turned the mirror so that it would reflect the rays of the sun and cast them upon the center of the pasteboard disk in front. As the holes in the two disks were in line, and in the same plane with the telescope, a small, round, but dazzling reflection was thrown across the valley, touching the ground near the tents.

Phil now began carefully to manipulate his instrument, so as to attract the attention of the distant man to the reflection. This required much care and considerable skill, as, at the dis-

tance to which it was thrown, a slight deflection of the instrument made quite a difference in the direction of the flash.

"I shall have to keep my eye to the telescope, Ken," he said, "and if you will please watch the mirror so as to keep it right with the sun, I think I shall surprise Neal pretty soon."

For some moments neither of them spoke, Phil meanwhile shifting his flash ever so slightly to the right, then to the left, then up, then down; but it seemed to dodge the man upon all sides.

At last he whispered, "Ah! I hit him then! He noticed it and looked around." In another minute he said excitedly, "I 've got him now, sure. He 's standing up and looking this way. Get a shirt or a blanket, Ken, and wave it. Quick!"

Ken seized the nearest article and waved it back and forth, saying, "Do you think he sees us, Phil?"

"I 'm sure he sees something," Phil replied, "but I guess he has n't quite got his wits collected yet. He 's gone into the tent on the run now. I 'll bet anything he 's after their glass. Here he comes again! Yes,— he 's right in the same spot, and I believe he 's pointing the glass this way. Keep on waving to him, Ken! Hurrah! He 's caught on! He 's waving his hat

now! He sees us, and recognizes us. Now he 's off, running as fast as he can go,—out of sight in the bushes. He 's gone after Dave!"

Ken was laughing gleefully, and was quite as much excited as Phil; but he asked, rather doubtfully, "Did you really see all that, Phil? I can't see anything at all over there, except the two specks of tents."

To which Phil replied with great satisfaction and importance, "You just wait a few minutes, and you 'll see. Dave won't hang on to his pick or shovel very long after Neal gets to him. He will have to fix the instrument and do the telegraphing, as Neal don't know anything about the combination. We use the Morse alphabet. You know, Dave and I both learned to be pretty fair telegraph-operators, and it was through that that we got to experimenting with the helioscope.

"Here they both come, running hard. Now Neal is pointing his arm this way, and Dave has the glass. Their working-place must be right close at hand. Dave is making a good, careful survey of us. Are you waving to him, Ken?"

"Yes, I 'm giving it to him strong," replied Ken.

"All right, ha, ha! He is capering about now. Both of them are dancing and waving their hats. Now I 'll give him the first salute. He can read my dots and dashes easily with his

naked eye, but he will have to fix up his instrument to answer me. Here goes. Now don't disturb me, please."

Phil then took an envelope from his pocket, and, using it to obscure the reflection from his mirror, made a rapid succession of "dots" of light by moving it up and down.

Then he began,—a short flash for a dot, and a long one for a dash. "Hello, boys!" he (or the instrument) said; "we got off the trail. Fix your instrument and tell us how to get over there. Hurry up! We want to reach there before dark."

Phil now placed his eye to the instrument again, explaining to Ken, as he did so, what his flash-message had been.

"Do you suppose he read it?" asked Ken.

"Yes, he 's waving his hat again. He got it all right. Now he 's gone into the tent. He will hustle his apparatus together and do some talking himself, presently."

In a few moments Phil said: "Dave is out again and sitting upon the ground. I fancy he is putting his helioscope together. Neal is bringing something too; I guess it 's the camp-table, for Dave to set the instrument on."

For a little while nothing more was said. Then Phil spoke suddenly: "I believe he is all ready, and is going to let us have it."

"I'LL GIVE HIM THE FIRST SALUTE."

Immediately there came a brilliant flash. "Yes, here he comes," said Phil; "now he 's going to talk."

Then followed a succession of flashes. Then, more slowly, came the dot-and-dash message, which Phil spelled out for Ken.

It said: "Glad to see you, fellows. Shake. Go back down the trail till you come to creek, and cross to other side. Then follow up creek to the ice bridge; cross again and keep on up stream. You can't miss west-side trail, but steep and rather dangerous. I will meet you near the bottom. Are you all right?"

To which Phil replied:

"Yes, all right. How is your prospect? Anything worth staying with?" Again came Dave's prompt answer:

"Yes, rich in gold. We think carries silver too, but no complete test yet. Can't explain now. Come and see. Must get lunch, then take the trail. Hurry along. Don't stop."

"All right. Au revoir," returned Phil; to which came back, "So long."

Phil took another glance through the telescope and said:

"He 's putting away his glass. We must do the same and pack up lively."

Ken, to whom Phil had interpreted the suc-

cessive messages back and forth, then said: "Well, Phil, I apologize. Your helioscope is all right, and has probably saved us much trouble. I will withhold my sarcasms next time."

"That 's all right, Ken," replied Phil, "there is nothing original about the instrument or its use. Dave and I happened to have tried it, that 's all."

"Well, it was a happy thought that led you to bring it up here."

"Yes, I am very glad we did," said Phil.

The boys were meanwhile busily engaged putting the pack into shape. This was speedily accomplished; Sancho was turned about, the pack lifted again into its place, and securely roped to the pack-saddle.

Then, with one minute's last look around at the matchless landscape and one brief glance into the blue depths of the basin beneath them, Ken shouted, "Come, Sancho, get up! Supper, boy! Grass and water over yonder!"

As Sancho belonged to an unemotional race, he did not plunge or hurry at this cheery salutation. He groaned, hesitated, then slowly started, and the small caravan began to pick its rough and hazardous way over the rocks — Ken leading, the burro following, and Phil bringing up the rear.

CHAPTER II.

A HUNTING TRIP, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

While Phil and Ken are retracing their steps toward the valley we will leave them for a moment, and in a few words explain who they were and what was the nature of their errand to the mountains.

Philip Wentworth's father had been a St. Louis business man who had gone heavily into Colorado investments.

Some five years before our story opens he had died quite suddenly while returning from the mountains, where he had been looking up some of his interests.

The widow soon learned that the business affairs of her deceased husband were much involved, and after careful consideration she decided to take up her residence in Denver, as being more nearly the center of the interests she was in hopes of preserving.

During the five years since her removal from St. Louis some of the investments had turned out very badly, some were involved in dispute,

while still others seemed to give promise of future value, but she had not found much upon which she had been able to realize.

However, with Phil's assistance, who, as he approached manhood, developed excellent business ability and judgment, she had been able to gather together enough to insure tolerable comfort for herself and son, so she decided to retain a few interests, in the hope that their value would be greater in the course of time.

Phil and Kenneth Carter had been friends from boyhood, and at school in St. Louis the similarity of their tastes had made the friendship still stronger. Phil had manifested quite a decided inclination toward mechanics and engineering, but his mother had seemed to need his assistance, and it therefore became necessary for him to leave school before he could accomplish his wish for a course in engineering.

After removing to Denver he had become acquainted with David Ballard, who was studychemistry and assaying at the school of mines, and the two boys were at once drawn together as intimates and friends. Phil had a room at his mother's home which he used as a workshop, and here he invited Dave, where together they worked and talked, giving and exchanging many ideas of interest and value to both.

What especially attracted Phil to David was the lad's perfect self-reliance and manliness. He had spent nearly all his life in the mountains. His father had been a mechanic in the employ of one of the large mining companies, and had been killed by an accident. His mother had died not long before, thus leaving David and one sister, two years younger than himself, orphaned and alone, but not entirely penniless. His father had accumulated a small fund of savings from his wages, and the company, after his accidental death, had bestowed the sum of two thousand dollars upon each of the children.

But now Dave's independent and manly spirit asserted itself. Retaining only what he thought he would need to carry him through his course in assaying, he conferred the balance of the whole sum upon his sister Lucy, placed her in the family of their aunt in Denver, and insisted that she have the advantage of a good education.

The summer preceding the one wherein this narrative opens, Phil received a letter from his old chum, Ken Carter. It was written from his father's home in St. Louis, and stated that he was greatly out of health. Ken had recently finished his university course and made a beginning at reading law, which profession he had intended following; but it was now feared that he had a

tendency toward lung weakness, and the family physician advised a change of climate, recommending a long visit in Colorado, with out-door life.

Kenneth asked Phil many questions about the conditions and the climate; whether life was regarded as endurable in a place like Denver; and, in case he should go farther on, into the mountains, what sort of surroundings he was to expect, etc.

Phil replied that, while he was extremely sorry for his old chum's ill-health, he would be more than glad to welcome him to Colorado. He was certain, he said, that the climate would benefit him; and as for the life and surroundings, he might trust him to make it as pleasant for him as possible. "Come and see," he said; "I am sure you will like Colorado, as we all do."

He went, almost at once, and Phil, with his mother's sanction, asked him to their own home.

As soon as they met, Phil was struck with much concern for his friend's health. The symptoms, to him, were plainly consumptive, and he had become rather expert in his judgment regarding ailments of invalids, of whom there were great numbers (particularly consumptives) continually coming into the state from the East.

The weather in the city during that season was unusually warm and dry; and, to Phil's so-

licitous eyes, it seemed as though Ken did not improve. One day, while talking the matter over with his new friend, Dave Ballard, Phil asked Dave if he did not think that being in the mountains and out of doors would be better for Ken than the city.

"It 's the very thing he ought to have," replied Dave. "I would be willing to warrant that if he will try it, it will bring him around in a few weeks."

"Then I certainly must get him to try it," said Phil. "But we shall have to arrange some sort of scheme or programme in advance, for Ken seems to dread the rough life of the mountains.

"It must be the sickness that has taken away his nerve. It 's not the way he used to be. Say, Dave, can't we get up some sort of a hunting party?"

"I wish we might," said Dave, whose eyes immediately began to glow with the anticipation of his beloved mountains. "How many persons do you want in the company?"

"O, almost any number of good fellows; I should think four would make a good party," replied Phil.

"Well, then, let me suggest something," said Dave. "You talk your friend Ken into going,

and I will send word to an acquaintance of mine, a miner and prospector, who has been everywhere, and knows of more good places than any man in the state. He and my father thought much of each other, and he will do a good deal for me. I have 'roughed' it with him already, and know him to be absolutely reliable in good weather and bad, and a splendid fellow too.

"But there 's one thing, though," and Dave began to speak somewhat hesitatingly; "do you suppose, Phil, that we can afford to pay him for his services as guide and assistant? I know he is 'broke,' and at present he is working by the month for one of the mines. I know his disposition well enough to be certain that he would like to join us under any circumstances, but I 'm afraid he will feel, just now, that he can't afford it."

Phil laughed gaily at Dave's modest way of urging his friend, and exclaimed: "Pay him? Well, I should think we would! We will pay him better wages than he is getting now, and think ourselves very lucky to get him. I 'd like to give you a gold medal, too, for speaking of him. You must remember, Dave, that Ken is rich, and his people would gladly spend a fortune to be able to restore his health. As this thing is being planned for his especial benefit, you will

see, in case it comes off at all, that Ken will insist upon paying for its entire cost. But, to get the negotiations started off upon a business basis, I want to say that I will guarantee it all myself. I am not rich, but I would do it alone if necessary. Of course I shall pay my own expenses anyhow, and I want to pay yours too, Dave."

"Thank you very much, but you can't have that pleasure," said Dave firmly. "It will not cost me a great deal, and I shall pay it myself."

"Well, we will arrange that when we come to the 'clean up,'" said Phil. "Now, about this friend of yours."

"He is of Scotch parents, and his name is Neal McInnis; a comparatively young man, although I do not know his precise age, and he has been knocking about the world, principally the West, ever since a lad. He seems to have been almost from end to end of the Rocky Mountains, and his fund of anecdotes of his personal experience is remarkable. In many respects he is a typical prospector; I presume you do not know the class, as I do, — I will tell you about them some time, — but, in general, I think he is an exceptional man. He is bright and witty, honest to a fault, uneducated, but very intelligent, always good-tempered, and the very best company imaginable.

"I know I have a tendency to be enthusiastic about Neal, but I am sure that a better man than he for such an expedition could not be found in the whole West. He will be great medicine for Ken. Neal and the mountain life will make a new man of him in short order."

"But are you sure we can get him?" asked Phil anxiously.

"Yes, I heard from him only lately, and it is only the pinch of necessity that keeps him where he is. He longs for the free life of the mountains; and then, like all prospectors, he wants to accumulate enough money to enable him to chase up some old idea of a mineral discovery. He will jump at the chance to go, especially if we offer him a little more pay than he is now getting. You go and hunt up Ken, and get him interested, and I will get a letter off to Neal immediately afterward."

Phil lost no time in telling Ken of the proposed hunt, and his interest was aroused with far less difficulty than had been imagined.

Dave and Phil then went about their preparations with the greatest enthusiasm, and in a few days a reply came from Neal McInnis saying that he would be very glad to join them.

The outcome of it was, — not to continue to too great a length the account of previous occur-

rences, — that one morning, about two weeks later, the expedition left Denver, headed for the mountains.

Neal had written that he would meet them at a given point over the range, and that he had his own saddle-horse; so that the caravan, after Neal had joined them, consisted of the three young men and their guide, and six animals, two of which were pack-horses.

It will suffice to state that the hunt was a glorious success. It was a round of pleasure, without a serious mishap or an unpleasant incident, from first to last.

Ken's health began to improve from the first day out; and in a few weeks he was as enthusiastic a mountaineer, and as brown, active, and athletic, as his companions.

Game of all sorts was abundant, and so easily obtained that the lads quickly settled into a plan of killing only as their needs required.

As theirs was not a slaughtering expedition, and their needs were supplied with little effort, the party devoted the larger part of its time to wandering hither and thither, obtaining the highest enjoyment from visiting points of interest, and viewing the scenes of beauty and grandeur which were upon every hand.

One evening, after having been out for several

weeks, all were sitting around their bright camp-fire.

Supper was over, and the boys were having their usual round of pleasant conversation and anecdote.

The subject this evening was mines and mineral discovery.

Ken had remarked to Neal that he saw him examining the rocks over which their trail led during the afternoon.

Neal laughed and said: "The habit has got such a big hold on me that it is the strongest part of me now, I guess. I found a little piece of galena 'float,' and was trying to see if there was any more of it."

"Did you find any more?" asked Ken.

"Yes, I found a little more, but the rock seems very lean. It did n't seem to me worth spending any time over. This locality we have been in for the last few days seems quite barren of mineral, compared to the district south of here."

"Neal thinks he can never rest contented until he makes a careful examination of a part of the county that he was in a year ago. He wants me to turn prospector and go with him next year," said Dave.

"And do you think of doing so?" asked Ken.

"No, I hardly think Neal will persuade me," laughed Dave. "The amusement is too expensive for a young man with a career to make, such as I. There is nobody who would enjoy finding a good mine any more than I would, though; and when Neal gets to talking in his positive way about the great things that are going to be found down yonder, I feel as though I would like to start right off. But when I soberly figure up the percentage of chances the average person has of striking anything, my judgment says 'No.'"

Ken then turned to Neal and asked: "What reason have you, Neal, for supposing that important discoveries will be made in the district Dave refers to?"

"Well," replied Neal, "I believe it will be found to be a rich country for two reasons. I was in there a year ago and I never in my life saw as much rich 'float' rock lying around as there is there. That, I suppose, is the main thing. But there is something else I look at that 's very important too. It 's high up in the mountains, with only ragged, towering rocks and narrow gulches, and although that will make it hard work to get about, and the summer season is, of course, very short, still these objections to the prospector are offset by the fact that what-

ever is there must be right in sight, and not covered up with earth. You will be able to see and trace the veins even at a distance.

"There *are* veins too, and large ones, because I saw the quartz 'float' carrying mineral that came out of them. I am going down there next summer, sure thing; that is, if I can get enough together to outfit me and see me through."

"I have been trying to persuade Dave to go with me, for selfish reasons, I suppose. I know he has got the right kind of stuff in him, and he is the kind of partner I would like to have. A man needs a good partner in that sort of country. But, on the other hand, I surely would n't want Dave to go with me if I did n't feel that the chances are first class for striking something good."

"I am sure you mean just what you say, Neal," said Ken; "but why did n't you stay long enough when you were there to make a careful examination of the country?"

"It was late in the season," replied Neal. "My provisions were low and the indications were for an unusually early winter. Snow had already begun to fall, and if you once saw the country you would appreciate what it would mean to be snowed-up there when not prepared for it."

"Dave," exclaimed Ken, "why don't you go with Neal and try it?"

"If I were differently situated," replied Dave, "I would do so. I have ambition enough to carry me there — and farther too — but Phil knows how I am placed."

"I think I understand you, Dave, and I hope you will pardon me for questioning you," said Ken.

He became silent for a few minutes, then spoke again.

"Fellows," he said, "I am going to propose something. Now, please don't misapprehend my meaning. This is strictly a business proposition. Neal has aroused my curiosity and interest in this locality of his to such an extent that I believe I would offer myself to him as a chum if I did n't know in advance that he would reject me. This is what I am thinking of, Neal. If Phil and I will agree to outfit and stake you and Dave, will you give us an interest in what you find? And, Dave, would you like to join in and go with Neal under such conditions?"

Neal was the first to reply, and said simply, "I will, and thank you for the offer. Will you go, Dave?"

"Yes," said Dave, "upon one condition. Ken has said it is a business proposition. Very

well, then, we will be equal partners. Ken and Phil furnishing the money, you and I will do the work, and the proceeds of the venture — if any — will be divided equally between the labor and the capital."

"Oh! no," said Ken eagerly, "Phil and I could n't take more than a third between us. We would even be content with a quarter."

Both Neal and Dave then spoke, insisting that it should be an equal division.

Up to this time Phil had remained a silent listener. Now he spoke, saying, "I think, Ken, it will be better to have it as Dave and Neal propose. I know they will be better satisfied."

So it was arranged upon that basis and carried out the following year.

Dave and Neal set out in June. It was arranged that in case they found anything of value, they were to endeavor to find some means of sending word to Denver, and that, according to the nature of the news received, Phil and Ken would set out to join them.

About the first of August Phil received a brief letter from Dave. It was dated July 20th, and read as follows:

"Dear Phil; We have found something. The vein is six feet wide at the surface and broadening as we go in. Neal is certain that it is high grade

in gold. For myself, I can't say, but it looks flattering. Come over, both of you. Bring a portable assay furnace and re-agents. Take the train to Bald Eagle, thence by Paradise Valley to Porphyry Creek. Follow creek northwesterly about twenty miles to the ice bridge. Cross over and you will see our trail. We are three miles beyond. Come soon as possible. Hastily yours, DAVE."

CHAPTER III.

THE "SLIDE"—SANCHO'S MISADVENTURE.

The precarious nature of the ground over which their course lay made conversation between the boys, for a time, out of the question. But in about an hour they reached a broad, comparatively smooth space which, although having a downward inclination, enabled Ken to drop behind the burro and walk beside Phil.

"How, do you suppose," he asked, "we made such a blunder in missing the trail?"

"It 's my fault," replied Phil; "I ought to have stuck to the plain directions in Dave's letter, and not have strayed away—and made you follow, too—in a chase after my brilliant and original idea. It 's all so clear now, that I don't see how I could have been such a chump. You noticed that Dave repeated in his flash-message—what he had told us before in his letter—that we must keep along up the creek to the 'ice bridge.' As we did n't see any ice bridge, we of course, left the creek too soon.

"I did n't forget any part of the letter, and was

on the lookout for the bridge up to the point where we turned away from the stream. At that point, you remember, we came to a steep slope covered with loose, sliding shale-rock. It did n't look, to me, as though the route lay across there, or hardly as though anybody *could* cross it with a burro and pack; so I put my wonderful thinking-machine to work, and reasoned it out this way.

"'We have n't found the ice bridge,' I said to myself, 'but the warm weather since Dave's letter must have melted it away. We will ford the creek here, and find the trail on the other side.'

"Well, you know, we *did* find something that looked a little bit like a trail, and kept on going. So, here we are. Dave and Neal will give me a great laugh, I suppose."

"O, well, I would probably have done just the same thing if I had been leading," said Ken generously. "That slope with the sliding rock was a place which no prudent man would be in a hurry to trifle with, and it was natural for you to conclude that the trail could n't run across it."

"I am not at all sure you would have made the same mistake," said Phil, "but you are rather consoling. There is another long steep stretch here, and I suppose one of us will have to take the lead again."

"Yes, I will go ahead," responded Ken, and he at once sprang forward and led the way down the rugged and winding declivity.

Another hour, or more, passed, during which there was no further chance for conversation.

Finally Ken stopped, calling out, "Whoa, Sancho!" Then, as Phil came up, he said:

"It is just below here that we crossed the creek, and yonder, on the other side, is the slide, which I suppose we will have to creep over, somehow."

"Yes," said Phil, pausing for a careful scrutiny of the broad stretch of sloping mountain side which was nearly opposite them, on the other side of the gulch, "from here, it does n't look very bad, either. I 'm more and more disgusted!"

"I am afraid we will find it to be more difficult than it appears from this point of view," said Ken. "Still, I hope it won't prove very bad."

"Well," exclaimed Phil with energy, "the sooner we are about it, the quicker we will know. If the other boys crossed with their two burros, it ought to be simple with one. Come, Sancho! Down you go. Here 's a chance for a drink and an elegant ice-cold bath."

The creek was as rapid as a mill-race, but not

extremely deep nor very broad at this point; and after a slippery scramble and a cold wetting all around, they were shortly upon the other side and climbing the mountain slope.

When at length they reached the place from whence they had turned aside in the forenoon, Phil began a careful examination of the ground. He went some distance down the trail, closely scrutinizing the ground on each side, above and below, but he at length returned, saying: "As far as the indications go, the trail comes squarely to an end here at the slide. They could n't rise into the air and fly, so they must have gone across on foot, eh, Ken?"

"There 's no doubt about that now, of course," replied Ken. "They went across right here at this point, and the reason why we can see no trail is that the loose shale has shifted and slid farther down hill since they went over. Possibly it moved as soon as they entered it." Hereupon Ken advanced a few steps along the slope among the rocks and debris. "No," he said, returning, "it 's most likely that the stones did n't awake to life and animation until our boys had passed over and beyond. They could n't have regarded it as anything to be afraid of, though, or there would have been something said about it in the letter Dave wrote."

"O, of course it can't be anything very dangerous," said Phil, somwhat impatiently. "We are losing time, and unless we lift our feet lively we may have a night's cold comfort somewhere along the side of the mountain."

"Yes, there 's no use in delaying," returned Ken; "but before we start, Phil, I want to offer a suggestion. There is a feature about this place which I think you have n't noticed, nor do I believe our boys saw it when they passed, because it 's only to be seen from the other side of the creek where we have been. I saw it just before we crossed. This loose sliding stuff is, apparently, some five or six hundred feet in width. Now, what I noticed was that the last half of it, or the side farthest from here, instead of continuing to slope downward to the bottom of the gulch, breaks off in an abrupt cliff where the creek bends inward. When the slide is in motion the stuff at the opposite side yonder must make a clean drop of three hundred feet into the creek and be carried below by the swift current. The thing for us to do, then, is to try to work diagonally up hill all the way over, and also to try and pass from one fixed rock to another. The largest rocks in sight look to me as if they were in place. I will go ahead, as before, and you keep Sancho moving from one rock to another."

"All right; no fear but what I 'll keep him moving. We 're in need of moving. Come."

So they started. For one half the way the boys' impressions were that it was merely somewhat more unpleasant walking than usual. The slope was nearly thirty degrees from the horizontal, or about as steep as loose rock could lie upon, and there was nowhere any firm or secure footing. Every step was from one flat or irregular piece of rock to another, and every piece of rock thus stepped upon invariably slid downward a trifle. As they were working their way in an upward direction, so as to overcome the ground lost through slipping, it was necessarily a most laborous task, and they were compelled to halt for breath and strength every few moments. But the boys could see that they were steadily progressing, and the stream did not display any apparent tendency to flow; so that Phil was almost upon the point of calling out to Ken that they might as well save their strength by moving in a horizontal instead of an upward direction, when Ken turned abruptly, saying: "This rock we are on now is in place; it is a part of the mountain formation, and you see that the rock-stream, when it flows, is divided here by a sort of island. The rest of the way is undoubtedly the worst part, for it not only seems to be a little steeper,

but it is just below here that the cliff begins. Let 's take a good breath and make up our minds to get across with as little stopping to rest as possible. If it does n't start to flow, we are all right, of course; but if it does, it is simply a question of how quickly we can scramble to the other side in order to save our necks. Is Sancho's cinch all right?''

''Yes, everything is O. K. Still, I doubt if so much caution is necessary, for I feel sure now that we are easily going to make the other half without any trouble at all,'' returned Phil.

''I hope you are right, Phil,'' said Ken. ''I don't doubt but we shall do it, but a little forethought is n't going to do any harm. Come, let 's go. If the stuff begins to move, remember we must keep our footing and keep striking out for the other side, too, as fast as we can. Sancho will be the worst trouble.''

They had advanced about fifty paces, in the same order and manner as before, when something seemed to give way below, and the boys realized that they were sliding steadily downward. A moment's glance around told them that the whole mass was in motion, above, below, and around. The noise — which was a combined rattling, grinding, and crushing — quickly grew into a roar, and Ken's voice, as he turned

and shouted back at Phil, did not reach him. Phil could only understand by his gesture and waving arms that they were to keep moving as fast as possible toward the point directly opposite them. Phil struck Sancho sharply and repeatedly to urge him on, and the faithful little fellow, — wise and judicious beyond belief, — without a trace of nervousness or fear, strained to the fullest to quicken his speed. They were certainly advancing, but they were also as certainly sliding with irresistible and constantly increasing speed toward they knew not what. Suddenly Sancho stumbled and fell. Phil struggled to his assistance, but was himself thrown, and lay almost helpless until Ken, turning about, seized Sancho by the head, turned it up hill, and succeeded in helping him to his feet, Phil following. There was no time to loosen the cinch, or even to cut the pack loose, and nothing to think of but to get beyond reach of the horrible stream of grinding porphyry. So they struggled on, panting, falling again and again, bruised, nearly spent, but determined. Then Ken, turning again, pointed below them to a line where everything was broken off and disappearing. Throwing himself to the rear, he seized Phil's hand and struggled onward again, leaving the burro behind them. The flat rocks slipped from beneath

as their feet struck them; heavy boulders, which threatened to overwhelm and crush, rolled past them and against their limbs; now Phil would fall, now Ken, but they staggered on, while the resistless chocolate-colored current bore them steadily downward.

They were gliding nearer to the fearful brink, and the roar was becoming yet more deafening; but nearer also was their approach to the fringe of upright rocks and bushes which formed the shore of the river that was neither fluid nor solid. A few steps more, another fall, a battling struggle to rise, a last plunge forward, and Ken's right hand seized a projecting root firmly imbedded in the bank.

Phil was down, and almost fainting as he drew him up, and then both lay prone upon solid ground.

Not long did they remain thus prostrate. With their returning breath came renewed anxiety for Sancho and the pack.

The intrinsic value of the bundle which Sancho bore was, to the boys, vastly greater than the poor beast himself, but their humane and generous instincts were uppermost in an emergency like this, and their solicitude was chiefly for the donkey.

That small but stout-hearted animal had, meanwhile, been fighting for life in his own pe-

"THE ROCKS SLIPPED FROM BENEATH THEIR FEET."

culiar way. With a methodical, reasoning judgment, in marked contrast to his cousin the horse (of whose nervous and excitable temperament he had no great opinion), the overburdened and weary Sancho, buffeted, bruised, and frequently overturned by the flinty torrent, but with senses all alert, kept his plodding way after his masters.

When Ken and Phil lay gasping for breath at the edge of the slide the donkey had been carried farther down, and managed to reach the margin at a point only a few feet above the brink of the cataract.

The channel of the rock-flow was defined at this place by a narrow parallel ridge of rock, which, on its farther side, fell away sharply toward the creek.

Sancho managed to drag himself from the mass of sliding rubbish, and to obtain here a precarious footing, where, shortly, he was discovered by the boys, who set up a joyful shout.

"He looks rather pensive, but seems to be sound and whole," said Phil. "By the way, Ken, are you hurt?"

"No, not to speak of. I guess there must be a little skin gone from my legs and elbows, that 's all. How is it with you?"

"O, I 'm all right, except my disheveled con-

dition and the damage to my wardrobe. I 'll bet, though, that I look as well dressed as you do."

The boys both joined in a hearty laugh at each other's forlorn appearance, and suddenly Phil said: "But we have lost a lot of time, and have got to do some hard climbing too. You see, we 've been carried a long way below the trail. We must get Sancho and pull out."

Now, whether it was that their hard experience had shaken the boys' nerves or perceptions, they, at any rate, did not realize the full sense of Sancho's dangerous position, nor of his exhausted state. So that when Ken undertook to lead him away, the poor burro swayed, made one or two staggering steps, his foot slipped from the smooth, slanting rock, and he plunged down the steep descent toward the creek bed. Ken barely saved himself from following, and Phil shouted in horror, but it was all over in a moment, and Sancho had vanished from sight.

It is to be understood that the burro had fallen down the side of the dividing ridge farthest away from the slide. The conformation here was quite different from that of the cliff over which the cataract plunged, the elements having molded the rocky ridge into many and curious forms.

There were sharp spurs projecting horizontally, upright pinnacles quite detached from the ridge itself, and there were tortuous and steep-sloping ravines that bore downward toward the creek bed, which could not itself be seen from above.

Sancho had rolled down one of these narrow and winding ravines until he disappeared from view; and as it seemed that the ravine must end in a precipitous cliff over which he would be dashed to death, the boys could feel no doubt of what the end had been, as the creek was two or three hundred feet below them.

"Poor Sancho," said Phil, almost with tears in his eyes. "It 's cruel, after making such a plucky fight for life, that he should then lose it on account of our stupidity."

"Yes," said Ken, "it seems entirely wrong, and it is a great misfortune to us too. We must manage somehow to clamber down there and find him, whether dead or alive, and see what shape the pack is in. There is a bare possible hope that he may be living."

"I fear the hope is bare indeed," replied Phil, "but we must go, as you say. We will try to survey the ground from above first."

It took some little time, and the boys had been trying from every nook and point of vantage to obtain a view of what lay below them, before

Phil at length shouted, "I see him! He is about half-way down, and lying flat upon a little ledge about as big as he is."

"Where is he?" asked Ken, who came running to the point where Phil lay with his body half overhanging the space below.

"There," said Phil, pointing. "It must have been a sharp bend in the ravine that snubbed him and broke his fall, landing him where he is. He 's still got his pack; but, of course, the poor little fellow is dead. No! By Jove! He 's alive!" yelled Phil. "I saw his ears move, and he raised his head a little!"

"I saw it too!" cried Ken excitedly. "It seems impossible that he could roll or tumble down so far and live through it. It 's no stranger, though, than that he should have stopped at all — either alive or dead — where he is now; for it looks as though it were all precipice below him. Come! Let 's find a way to get down there to help him; that is, if there *is* any way."

"He 's moving again," said Phil. "What do you suppose he is going to do?"

As it appeared impossible to reach the donkey, the boys now fell to watching him in silence.

All who are familiar with the characteristics of the burro — as distinguished from those of the

horse — know that, under like circumstances, the horse would plunge and rear until he had thrown himself to destruction.

Not so with the wiser and cooler-headed animal.

First, he stretched out his feet as though cautiously feeling the nature of the ground. Then, slightly raising his head, he looked about, as far as he was able. Then, apparently with the most careful thought and judgment, he placed each foot where it would find the most secure holding, and with a good deal of effort slowly arose.

Simultaneously the two boys broke into a cheer.

"Hurrah for you, Sancho!" "Good boy!" "We 'll stay with you, old fellow!"

The flow of rock down the slide had about ceased, and the noise having died away, the sound of their voices was doubtless borne to Sancho. At least his ears moved, and he bent his neck slightly as if listening, but he could not see whence the shouts came.

"Come, Ken," said Phil, "we must see if there is a way to get to him, or help him out of that. We will have to make a roundabout tour, I suppose. It won't do to go down the same way he did. We would n't be likely to have the same luck."

"All the same, we must find the quickest way. The afternoon is wearing along fast," replied Ken.

Retracing their way over the point of rocks, and thence along the hillside, they found that by turning and zigzagging they were at length able to reach a point within a few feet of where the burro stood.

They spoke to him, and he looked at them with patient eyes from underneath his grizzled, shaggy brows.

He seemed to say, "Well, I 've done the best I can, and you will have to do the rest. I 've no complaint to make, but you know I did n't come here of *my* accord."

"I declare! He shames me by looking at me that way," said Ken. "How are we going to do now, Phil?"

"That 's more than I can say just now," replied Phil, "beyond the fact that it is going to be impossible to get him out of that place to-night. There are fifteen or twenty feet between him and ourselves that even *we* can't cross. It does n't need any study to see that there 's only one possible hope for the poor jack. If we had one or two steel-pointed picks, a drill and hammer, and a little giant-powder, we could fix a trail so that he could be led away. We are

miles from camp, which is the only place they can be had, and night will soon be here.

"It 's almost heartbreaking to think of such a thing; but we simply must leave him to take care of himself until to-morrow, and go on to meet Dave."

"O Phil!" said Ken, and there was a tremble in his voice, "the poor little beast has had nothing to eat since morning; he must be worn out with fatigue, to say nothing of the knocks and bruises, and now to talk of his standing in that cramped position, with the heavy pack on his back, until to-morrow! Why, it 's frightful!"

"Yes, yes, Ken, I know it. It would be inhuman if there were any possible way for us to help it. But is there? You can see for yourself there is n't. So we must just go on, and keep our thoughts rather upon some way of helping him in the morning, than on the pitifulness of it all. Come! Let 's go."

"I believe I will stay here with him until you get back in the morning," said Ken.

"O, come now; talk sense!" retorted Phil rather sharply. "You will do no such thing. Or, at least, if you try it on, you will compel me to stay too; for I shall not leave you. You are about worn out yourself. You would get to

dozing and roll down the mountain before morning. Besides, the burro will be no safer with than without you, and I guarantee he will pull through it. Come! We must hurry."

"Oh! you 're right, Phil, of course; but it 's mighty tough," said Ken. So they turned and left Sancho without looking back.

The donkey watched them until, just as they were disappearing around a bend in the cliff, he gave voice to one of his hee-hawing, deep, long-drawn brays, which to the boys was both melancholy and reproachful.

CHAPTER IV.

MEETING — DINNER AT CAMP.

The boys had no difficulty in locating the trail where it emerged from the rock-slide, and followed it northward in silence and with rapid footsteps.

They were so anxious and distraught that even the remarkable features of the region through which they were passing, which ordinarily would have aroused their keenest interest, were scarcely noticed.

They were passing "through" in a literal sense, as their trail now fairly clung to the side of the cliff, which towered overhead to an unknown height, and almost directly beneath them flashed the thread of the creek, while across at their left the ragged, frowning, gray precipice seemed to lift itself into the very clouds.

The cañon had narrowed and closed in upon the creek until it almost seemed as though the sole illumination were merely the reflected rays from the glistening whitecaps of the mountains.

Once only did Ken warm to something like

enthusiasm. It was when, after rounding a curve, the brilliant view of a waterfall burst upon them. It left the snow bank upon the opposite mountain, apparently as a single line of silver, broadening as it descended into an exquisite lace-like pattern, then merging into thin bluish veiling, until at their level it became light, broadly diffused mist.

Half-way toward the top, upon an almost imperceptible ledge, a family group of big-horned cimarrons — or mountain sheep — looked with grave curiosity down upon them, and without a trace of fear.

"It is immense; it is grandly impressive; but just now my spirits will not rise to a height which will permit me to say beautiful," said Ken.

"No, we must take another day for that," replied Phil.

Another half-hour, and the cañon had perceptibly widened, while the trail had approached more nearly to the bottom of the gulch. Not that their way had been a descending one; rather the bed of the creek had been rising to them as they advanced toward its source.

A short distance farther, a few more turns and twists, and Phil suddenly said: "I believe we have found the ice bridge at last. It must be that great body of snow and ice up yonder, which

stretches clear across the creek. It came down as an avalanche from the mountain, of course,— there 's its path now,— and the creek has tunneled its way underneath it."

"Yes, Phil, that 's interesting; but who is the man there?" asked Ken.

"Where? O, I see! sitting down! Why, it must be Dave!" Phil put his thumb and forefinger to his lips and blew a shrill whistle. Instantly the figure sprang to its feet, gazed at them an instant, then answered with a shout, and came running toward them across the bridge.

Phil shouted in return, and likewise broke into a run, closely followed by Ken.

At the meeting, and first warm hand-shaking, all began to talk at once. "Just like women," laughed Dave. "But, say, boys, what 's happened? Where 's your burro and pack?"

"You tell it, Phil," said Ken. Whereupon Phil rapidly recounted their rough experience, and explained the present whereabouts of Sancho. "Why, we had no trouble there," cried Dave, "and had no thought of its being any more dangerous than a score of other places. They are all comparatively dangerous, for that matter. Strange that the slide should have let us pass in safety and then treat you so!"

"Yes, it 's curious," said Ken; "but I sup-

pose there must be a natural cause behind it, somewhere. I presume the only thing that caused us to suspect danger in advance came through missing your trail, which had been plain enough before, but vanished there completely."

"What do you think, Dave? is there a possibility of doing anything for the burro to-night?" asked Phil.

"That 's out of the question," replied Dave. "It 's at least four miles back, and three from here to camp. We can make camp before dark, but nothing more. I would join you at any risk, if there was a show at all. I don't envy Sancho the night he will have to pass, but I know enough about the endurance of the average jack to assure me that we will find him right there to-morrow. What sort of shape do you fancy the pack is in? I am anxious about that assay outfit."

"It 's not easy to say, but I think it will be all right. Everything breakable was well packed," said Phil.

"Well, 'march' is the word now. If you are not already hungry, you will be before we get supper. Neal will have it all ready when we arrive, though; you may be sure of that."

So saying, Dave started up the trail and Phil and Ken followed.

As it was all uphill work, and the climbing

even more laborious, in some respects, than that which had gone before, Ken and Phil were more than thankful when Dave at length called cheerfully back to them, "Here we are, and just in time too. It will be dark in a very few minutes. That 's why I rushed you up here at such a pace. You saw enough of the trail to realize what it would be in the night-time; and I think none of us needed that additional experience to-day. We won't bother about any of the landscape features until to-morrow. Fine as they are, they must bide their time."

The others made but faint response to Dave's pleasantries, being, in truth, so far spent with weariness and hunger that their senses were somewhat blunted. This fact was quite evident to Dave, who therefore, led the way directly to the camp, first announcing their arrival to Neal by a loud whistle.

Neal quickly answered, and in a minute more they were all exchanging greetings.

"The first thing now," said Dave, "is supper. The boys are so starved and winded that they must be excused from all social duty until they have a chance to renew themselves."

"All right, boys," returned Neal in his hearty, pleasant voice, "supper is just about ready, all but the coffee, and it will be better for you to

rest a bit before eating, anyway. The more careful people are about eating, 'specially when they 're very tired, the better for digestion and sleep. Not that I 'd preach against eating a plenty. When you 're hungry, eat to the end of your appetite, I say, but use a little judgment how you eat. No danger of overeating here to-night, I guess. Variety too limited. Dave, you 'll show the boys to the toilet-room, won't you, in case they want to brush up?"

Ken and Phil meanwhile had thrown themselves upon the blankets inside one of the tents, whither Dave had conducted them.

The tent-flaps were thrown up to admit the light and warmth of the fire, just in front, where Neal was superintending the supper.

The rest to their limbs was so grateful, the scene so pleasant and familiar to them, the sound of Neal's voice so agreeable, and the odor of the supper so appetizing, that they both forgot and temporarily threw off their weight of care.

After resting a few minutes, Phil arose, saying: "I think I 'll try the water-cure that Neal speaks of. What do you say, Ken? By the way, there can't be any scarcity of water here, to judge from the lake and the waterfall we saw from the other side. Is that the sound of the fall we hear now?"

"Yes, that is music we always have," replied Dave; "we think it is rather pleasant."

"I 'm sure I should never grow tired of it," said Ken.

"Supper 's ready," called Neal; and, hastily completing their toilets, the boys assembled by the fire.

"Take the bench at the table there, boys," said Neal. "Sit down, Dave, I 'll do the waiting."

"Why, this is genuine luxury!" exclaimed Phil, as they seated themselves at the open-air table facing the camp-fire.

"What? The table and seats? O, well, I think a little labor of that sort is well spent. There 's no sense in making a circus performance of your meals, when you can just as well do them up comfortable.

"Help yourselves to the meat and biscuits. Here 's mutton-chops and here 's bacon. I 'm glad you came just when you did, or my biscuits might have spoiled. I guess they 'll do. Will you have some beans, Ken? We have n't any jelly to go with the mutton, but here 's some prime stewed shad-berries. Have sugar in your coffee, Phil? There is cold bread if you rather have it than the biscuits."

"What a glorious supper!" cried Ken. "But what do you mean by mutton, Neal?"

"Wild mutton. It 's mountain sheep," said Neal. "Dave got him last week."

"Is n't it delicious? I never ate venison to compare with it. There must be a good many about here. We saw some to-day. You remember it was one of my ambitions last summer to get one; but although I shot almost everything else, I did n't get sight of a sheep. Say, Phil, did you ever eat as fine a supper as this before?"

"Not so far as I can remember," answered Phil. "I knew you were an artist at cookery, Neal, but this is immense."

"Hold on there, fellows; you will make Neal vain!" interposed Dave.

"Yes, I s'pose you will be likely to stay here some time, and you ought to be careful what you say. Maybe you 'll want to take it back after a while," laughed Neal. "Have some more of the mutton? No? Well, you must have some dessert; it 's plain, but wholesome. Boiled rice served with a fruit sauce. Call it *riz aux pommes* if you think the name will dovetail in with the dried apple sauce, the tin plates, and iron spoons."

"It 's delicious," said Ken, as he tasted it. "A very proper ending to a meal good enough for an epicure."

"Neal," said Phil, as he finished and rested

from his exertions, "I feel like another person; and I owe you a heavy debt that I will try and pay sometime, when you teach me how to cook."

"All right, Phil; I 'll be easy with you about the debt," replied Neal. "Now, I want credit for not asking a single question about your trip, and I 'm dying to hear. Let 's have the story."

"The boys had hard luck, Neal," interposed Dave. "They are afraid they 've lost their jack, and are all broken up over it. I think, myself, that we will fetch him out all right; but we are going to strike out at daybreak with one of our animals, some tools and powder, a water-bucket, a hundred feet of line, and a little bunch of grass. We 've got to construct a high-line road for Sancho's exclusive use. We 'll give you the details after we get back. I must get everything ready to-night."

"All right, Davey boy, I'll help you soon as I get these supper things out of the way and the kinks all settled for an early breakfast. You 'll want me to go with you?"

"No, we three will go. It will be better not to leave the camp alone, considering the value of our 'find.'"

"Had n't I better go in your place, then?" asked Neal.

"No, I will go," Dave replied.

CHAPTER V.

A FOUR-FOOTED CONTORTIONIST—THE RESCUE.

The party of three, with burro, tools, and paraphernalia, was upon its way down the trail long before the sun emerged from behind the maroon-colored mountains to the eastward, and before nine o'clock had arrived at the place where Phil and Ken left poor Sancho.

The anxiety of each was so great that no word was spoken as to their hopes and fears.

Ken led the way down the zigzag descent from the trail, and Dave and Phil followed more slowly with the burro.

Ken, with knitted brows and impatient footsteps, had advanced until hidden from the sight of the others, and coming at last to the final turn from whence the looked-for animal became visible, he hardly dared believe his eyes.

There stood Sancho, looking scarcely more drooping and unsteady than when he arose to his feet the afternoon before.

"Bless your heart, Sancho! I 'm glad to see you, old boy!" he shouted.

Whereupon Sancho bent his long ears, scanned him an instant, and gave forth the same plaintive bray as his parting salute of the evening before.

This was heard by the party in the rear, who gave answering shouts. Even their burro responded in a sympathetic and kindred vein.

Reaching the farthest limit of approach, all hands set to work without losing a minute of time. The rock being shaly and partly decomposed, a level pathway of two or more feet in width was speedily wrought out from the smooth, slanting surface. Only one small charge of powder was necessary, all the rest of the work being accomplished with their sharp steel picks.

In less than an hour's time Ken was across the space and had a rope around Sancho's neck. It needed but a single word of command to the donkey to start him, and in another minute he had reached the safety-point, and the boys were unroping the pack.

Dave, however, — thoughtful as always, — had hastily tied his long line to a bucket, and creeping to the verge of the cliff, dropped it into the creek below. A minute more it reappeared filled to the brim with ice-cold sparkling water, and Sancho's troubles, for the time being, were ended.

After placing the bunch of green grass before

the hungry donkey, Dave, with the assistance of the others, turned his attention to the contents of the pack.

The object of his greatest solicitude was the assay furnace and its accompanying re-agents.

After a careful scrutiny, he announced with great satisfaction, that there was no damage to anything except a few scorifiers and crucibles, which were broken.

"There will still be more than enough for our needs," he said. "I was especially anxious about the muffle; but you had it placed inside the furnace, as it should be, and it has come through without a scratch. If you ever attempt to relate this adventure to anybody outside the mountains, don't expect to be believed. Sancho would make your fortunes as trick-donkey in a circus. He is a wizard."*

The boys laughed in light-hearted amusement over Dave's speech, and turned their attention again to the hero. No donkey was ever the recipient of more petting and complimentary expressions than he.

He was found to have several cuts and some very severe bruises from contact with the sharp

*This incident is not only a real one, but the actual occurrence was even more strange than has been related. The writer has purposely trimmed it down, in order that it may not be criticised as absurd.

"In another minute he had reached the safety point."

rocks, but Dave declared he would be as good as new after he had had a week's "lay-off" at the camp.

"The pack is what really broke his fall, and prevented him from going over the precipice," said Dave. "After he finishes his lunch we will let him lie and rest a short time, after which we will put the pack on Teddy and start back for camp."

This plan was carried out so well that with diligence, but without haste or extra effort, they arrived at the camp early in the afternoon.

Neal had dinner ready and waiting when the party arrived.

As a change from the previous evening's fare, there was a delicate and tender pot-roast of the wild sheep, new bread, and for dessert, apple roll, or "duff," eaten with syrup.

"Circumstances don't allow much change in our grub, or in the style of throwing it onto the table," said Neal, in a half-apologetic way.

"O, we found out last summer that the boys can fit themselves into a situation as well as anybody," said Dave. "They realize that we are here for work, this time, and that eating is merely a necessity of life. To have enough food to satisfy hunger is about the only care Neal and I have given in that direction. We spend very

little time in camp, and a great deal at work upon the 'prospect.' You see, we will have to regard you, not as guests, now, but as partners and fellow-sufferers."

"That is the way we want you to regard us," said Ken. "There is n't likely to be much suffering about it, either; and for my part, I intend to learn to cook, too, and take my share of all the rest of the duties."

"I 'm to be counted in for the whole programme, too," cried Phil. "There 's going to be no favoritism here."

"As far as this dinner is concerned," added Ken, "it seems to me even better than last night's. I can be happy and thrive under this diet for many months to come. I only hope that I can learn to cook half as well as Neal. Just now, though, I am burning up with curiosity about the discovery, and everything in connection with it. Are you ready to show us the elephant? Do you really feel quite sure that you have found a rich mine?"

Neal and Dave exchanged meaning smiles.

"Where are some of the rocks, Neal?" asked Dave.

"I 'll get them," was the reply.

Neal disappeared within one of the tents, and returned in a minute with a gunnysack. It was

evidently heavy, as he used both hands in carrying it. Dropping it upon the ground, he seized a canvas pack-cover and spread it out. Then, taking the sack by its lower corners, he emptied its contents upon the canvas.

There were about fifteen or twenty pieces of grayish white rock covered with shining yellow spots. Neal handed one each to Phil and Ken, saying, "That 's the quartz article we are getting, and it 's no weak imitation, either."

Both boys cried out in amazement.

"Do you mean to say that the yellow stuff is gold?" asked Ken.

"Yes, largely pure. At least, as pure as it is generally found in the natural state. I think the native gold must be as high as eighteen dollars to the ounce. Besides the free gold, there is a combination here called 'telluride.' It is a union of gold with tellurium."

"Why, the rock is fairly ablaze!" shouted Phil.

He took up the pieces one after another, examined them with dilated eyes, and passed them to Ken.

"I never saw anything so wonderful!" said he. "What value do you place upon this lot, Neal?"

"These pieces weigh, together, about a hun-

dred pounds, and I estimate that there 's about a thousand dollars' worth of gold in them."

"Man alive! That 's twenty thousand dollars to the ton!" exclaimed Ken.

Neal laughed with great amusement. "Yes, that 's about the rate," he said, "and if we should feel like turning ourselves into 'promoters,' capitalize our property for a three-million-dollar figure, and undertake to sell stock, about the first thing we would do would be to take up that 'catch-phrase' you just used. But, you see, Ken, we have n't even *one* ton of it yet; and maybe never will have. There 's hardly one chance in a thousand that it will stay with us as rich as this. Still, I 'm bound to say, that every indication about the vein and the rock it 's in, gives promise of being a first-class property. We will be able to guess better after knowing how it assays."

"Where is this wonderful treasure-box? Come! I 've got to see it!" exclaimed Ken with energy.

Whereupon the whole party proceeded to the mine, or "prospect," as Neal and Dave called it.

"If you had arrived three days ago we could n't have shown you as much 'richness' as we can now," said Neal. "We have only just struck this pocket. We knew we had a promis-

ing vein, and we found free gold by crushing the rock and washing it in a pan, but there was n't much in the quartz to be seen with the naked eye. Here it is! We are working into the vein by the tunnel."

"How far are you in?" inquired Phil.

"About thirty-five feet. Look up the face of the cliff there, and you can see how plain the seam stands out, and that it runs up as far as you can see. It is about six feet wide, and seems to run right through the mountain in a nearly north-and-south course. I don't know why it is, but it seems as if most of the rich and permanent veins trend the same way."

"But did you climb away up here upon uncertainty before you found it?" asked Ken.

"No, not altogether. We had camped down near the ice bridge, and I wandered off up the valley, keeping well toward the creek. When I got to a point opposite here (and about fifteen hundred feet nearly underneath), I found a lot of rich float. It was easy to trace it here; and, in fact, the lode is as plain most of the way down the cliff below us as it is above. It is handier to work here; but my theory is, that we 're liable to find it, maybe, even richer below than above. Some time, when I get really wound up for talking, I 'll tell you why."

"The rock that forms the cliff here seems to be a sort of porphyry," remarked Phil.

"Yes, this whole district seems to be porphyritic. It ain't easy, though, for me to classify this particular mountain. The native rock seems to me to be a sort of volcanic quartzite, but Dave calls it porphyrite. I 'm beginning to think they run into each other, and that you can call the stuff either one. I can show you, too, where our vein intersects schists and shales, and other sedimentary and metamorphic rocks. That's in our favor. At least I think so; and so does Dave. You see, we keep comparing notes all the time. I give Dave my ideas, got mostly from grubbing 'round 'mongst the hills, and he gives me things he 's got from books. Most of these big words I use, I borrowed from him."

Neal laughed gaily, and Dave smiled. It was very evident how much they thought of each other.

"Come," said Dave. "We will go on into the tunnel."

The mouth of the tunnel was nearly six feet square, and opened directly into the side of the cliff.

The "ceiling," or roof, was timbered; that is, there were rough pieces of wood placed across, close together, and supported by upright timbers.

This was to prevent the loosened ore or rock from falling upon the workers.

"We started the tunnel at the full width of the vein, and took out everything between the two walls," said Dave, "but it is widening somewhat, and we will not be able to increase the width of the tunnel."

Dave drew a candle from a niche in the rock, and lighted it, and then led the way inside, saying, "You won't be able to see any ore except right at the end, or 'breast,' as we have taken it all out as we went in."

When they reached the end, he held his candle so as to produce the best effect. "Come up close, boys, and examine it," he said.

More than half of the breast was aglitter with the same quality of ore as the pieces they had seen.

"Isn't it magnificent?" cried Phil, his voice betraying his strong excitement. "I don't know much about mines, Neal, but you will find it pretty hard to convince me that what is in sight here is n't a promise of a great fortune. Don't you think so, Ken?"

"It certainly looks to me as if we had a great mine," replied Ken.

"I 've no wish to make you think the contrary, you may be sure," said Neal laughingly.

"But, while my hopes are pretty big over this thing, it ain't a good idea to feel too dead sure about a thing until you 've got it; and after a while, maybe, with the help of Dave's education and my pocket-dictionary, I 'll try to explain how it might disappoint us yet."

"Is the rock hard to work?" asked Ken.

"No," replied Dave, "it is rather soft. We have n't made great progress, because we have n't been as well equipped for working a mine as for *finding* one. What with carrying the stuff out to the dump on a hand-barrow, and trying to keep drills sharp without a forge, it uses up the day pretty snug. I think all four of us working together can move along at the rate of six to eight feet a day, — at least, as the rock is now running."

"That was well put in," said Neal. "We must look to see it get harder."

"Well, we are n't going to work to-day; so we will show the boys around the rest of the 'estate.' They can be our 'guests' for a little while," remarked Dave. "After that, we must attend right away to the matter of the claims. We have taken up two claims, Ken; one in your name and one in Neal's; as you and he are of age, and Phil and I are not. To make the matter legally binding, you must go through the

formality of taking up your own claim, as the law does n't recognize any proxies."

"If I 'm to be claimholder of such vast wealth as this," said Ken, "I don't want to delay a minute. What 's to be done?"

"You will understand it better as we go around, and we can attend to it afterward. It is perhaps as necessary for you to become acquainted with your property as to hold it."

The party meanwhile was picking it's way through a grove of "quaking-asp" (aspen) trees in the direction of the waterfall, the sound of whose rushing downpour was borne to their ears.

A short walk brought them to a rapid stream, and following this downward a little way, they came to the shore of the lake.

Dave, who had been leading, turned and pointed high in the air behind them, then swept the horizon with a circular wave of his arm.

Casting their eyes aloft and then following the direction of Dave's gesture, the boys simultaneously uttered a cry of admiration.

From the dizzy and vague region of the clouds the stream shot downward toward them, giving the effect of long curving leaps from ledge to ledge. To the right, where the cliff was more precipitous, the lake advanced to its very foot, and the lofty, moss-covered and variegated face

was mirrored in the bright water with the accuracy of a photograph. On the farther side, where the shore was margined by a pine-covered ridge which broke down from the towering cliff, the contrast formed by the line of trees against the luminous blue of the sky, together with the rose and pearl of the more distant peaks, made a picture which, all in all, was never to be forgotten.

"O, I am in love with this place!" exclaimed Ken. "I would covet it as a possession even without the gold mine."

"Yes, it 's beautiful. It seems to me a place where one need never grow homesick," said Phil.

"There will be a wonderful change when winter comes," said Neal. "But that is a long way off yet."

The little party resumed its walk and moved along the edge of the lake, passing, presently, the three donkeys, which were all — Sancho included — eagerly cropping the grass.

"One thing here surprises me greatly," said Ken. "It is the variety and strength of the vegetation. The altitude must be great."

"Yes, it 's unusual; but I think it could be explained," replied Neal. "We are not only on the Pacific slope, where the timber-line runs higher, but are well protected from the north and get plenty of sunshine. Besides, the warm

southwest winds find a regular channel into the valley of Porphyry Creek, through two or three passes to the south of here. You will notice, though, that the trees are all pretty small-sized. This quaking-asp springs up in smart style, but, while the spruce and mountain-pine have thick branches, they are not high, and there 's a big proportion of jack-pine. The mountain-ash, you see, is very small, and the cedar is nothing but a dwarf. But the undergrowth is rich; and just look at the flowers! they are of a hundred kinds."

"The birds like the place too," remarked Dave. "I have seen humming-birds several times; and there are magpies, and mountain-jays, and grouse, and ptarmigan, and the water-ousels splash around the lake and waterfall every day."

"Do you know what the altitude is?" Ken asked.

"Not with certainty, but Neal says the test by boiling water shows it to be about twelve thousand feet."

They had now made a circuit of half the lake, and here Neal turned away from the water and led the way through a heavy growth of shad-berry or service-bushes literally weighted with their blue-black fruit.

Emerging from the bushes, they stood upon

the verge of an almost sheer descent of a quarter of a mile, down which the outgoing stream from the lake sprang with a flying dash that seemed all the greater from its brief rest.

"If the nights here become very dark, a person ought not to wander far from camp without tying a line around his waist," said Phil. "Just see the creek down yonder; it 's nothing but a thread. Gracious! What a drop it would be! Say, Ken, there 's the mountain across yonder we signaled from with our helioscope."

"Yes," said Neal, "we have three of the great necessities of a first-class mine."

"What are they?" Ken asked.

"Beautiful scenery, pure air, and a magnificent dumping-ground. I will go a little farther, and say that our mine has a fourth item that 's 'most always of benefit, though some do without it, and that 's a body of rich ore."

The boys laughed heartily at Neal's quaint and happy raillery. Then Dave spoke, saying, "Now we will show you about the matter of the claims. Let 's walk along the cliff until we reach the point where the vein outcrops, and Ken can set the stakes as he sees fit. We have set them only as a matter of form."

CHAPTER VI.

SCIENTIFIC MEASUREMENTS UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

They followed the edge of the plateau a few hundred feet, when Dave stopped, saying: "You can see the vein here, Ken. It is as well defined and of about the same thickness as where we are working.

"Now, the idea to be kept in mind is this: we wish to guard ourselves against being intruded upon by any other people who may come after us and for that reason we ought to claim as much of this vein we have discovered as the law will permit us to hold.

"A single claim may be fifteen hundred feet in length along a vein, and one hundred and fifty feet on each side, or three hundred feet wide. A length of fifteen hundred feet will not cover all that 's in sight here, but three thousand feet *will*. So we concluded to have a second claim as an extension of the first; and supposing the first one to start at the creek down below us yonder, and extend horizontally along the vein for fifteen hundred feet, it will end here on our plateau

somewhere. The second claim, or extension, will take up the vein where the first one ends, and carry the lines of our property far enough up the mountain (and inside it, in line with our tunnel) to make us secure in the whole thing. Nobody can then bother us. Do you get the idea?"

"Yes, I see the point, and I think it 's a very wise plan. You said you had already set the stakes. Do you mean that you have measured off the claims?"

Dave laughed. "No," he said, "we have n't, and that 's a point I was coming to.

"It 's impossible, as you can see, to do it by measurement, on account of the cliffs, and the distances must be had by triangulation. Neither Neal nor I have enough engineering knowledge to do this, although Neal has a first-rate compass. It is graduated and has a vernier, has two levels and folding, open sights. Do you suppose you can do what is necessary, and with an instrument of that sort?"

"Well, let 's see Neal's compass. I always liked engineering, and at the university I had considerable surveying practice with the boys. I have done very fair work with an open-sight instrument; but, of course, nobody would choose one to do fine work with. Still, this is a very

plain and simple bit of work. It might be done."

"I will have it here in a minute," said Neal, and he started for camp on a run.

"There are some things to keep in mind in locating a mine," said Dave. "We 've got to file certificates of our locations at the land-office; and sometimes, in case of a contest, it happens to be a mighty important thing whether you are correct or not. I 'm telling you this so that you may not take any very big risk on this instrument."

"I think I can tell when I examine and test it," replied Ken.

"Now, to save time, let 's see if there is any object down by the creek, in line with the vein, that we might obtain a tolerably fine sight upon."

After a careful scrutiny the tip of a blasted and whitened jack-pine was selected as being in line with the course of the vein.

The pine was easily to be distinguished, as it stood right beside a huge gray-and-black boulder upon the bank of the creek.

"Now, let 's measure off a base-line close along the edge of the cliff, and make it as long as possible," said Ken.

Just then Neal returned, bringing his compass and a steel tape-line. "I got these things," he

said, "from a fellow who was down on his luck and in poor health, and wanted to sell them. I did n't have any use for the things, — it was two years ago, — and did n't have too much money, either, but I finally gave him fifteen dollars for the outfit, with the understanding that he could have 'em back if he came with the money. He never showed up, so I suppose they 're mine."

"Have you ever made any use of them?" asked Ken.

"Yes, I 've used the tape for measuring and the compass for running straight-ahead lines. They don't take up much space in packing, and they often come in handy in the mountains."

Ken, meanwhile, was examining the instrument, which he found to be expensively made, and encased in a handsome flat box. He removed it, opened the sights, tested the levels, and examined the graduated circle and vernier with his pocket magnifying-glass.

"It 's an unusually fine instrument of its kind," he said, "and must have cost it 's former owner at least fifty dollars. The sights can be lengthened. I never saw one like it before. That will help us immensely, as I was wondering how it would work on vertical angles as sharp as these are. Yes, I feel quite sure I can do

pretty good work with it. After we measure our base-line I will make a test of what it is able to do, by triangulating to some point up here on the plateau, and then measuring to the same point with a tape. Have you anything which will answer the purpose of a standard or tripod, Neal?"

"I brought along this sharpened post with a flat top," replied Neal. "The compass-box has a sharp brad in the center of the under side, to prevent it from slipping."

"That will do, I think. Now for the base-line."

Ken soon found that he could easily obtain a base-line six hundred feet in length along the edge of the cliff, which he carefully measured, marking each end with a stake. Each post was plainly visible from the other.

This being accomplished, Ken then proceeded to level the instrument at one of the posts.

Then, pointing to a distant dead aspen tree, he said: "I am going to triangulate to that tree, which is quite as distant from here, I think, as the creek down below is. I mean horizontally, of course. I wish two of you would measure the distance from here to the tree, very carefully, and then we will compare notes. While you are doing it, I will have to go to camp for a little

book of mine, which contains sine and tangent tables."

Quickly returning, he sighted with the compass from one post of the base-line to the other, and then to the aspen tree, carefully noting and marking down the angle of deflection.

He repeated this process three times.

Then he turned the instrument, and sighted below to the jack-pine by the creek, reading the angle contained between that point and the other base-line post. This he also repeated three times, noting and marking down the result as before.

Then picking up his instrument and the sharpened post, he walked to the other end of the base-line and went through the same formula.

By this time the others had returned from making the measurement.

"I will have my result presently," said Ken; "please don't give me yours until I have figured out mine."

He took out his pocket-book, saying, "This little book will save me the labor of figuring out the sines of my angles; and all there now remains for me to do is a little problem in proportion.

"This is the statement:

The sine of the angle opposite given side.	:	Sine of the angle opposite required side.	::	Given side.	:	Required side.

He figured for a minute or two, referring to his book and then announced:

"I make the distance from the farther post to the dead aspen nine hundred and eighty-four and a half feet."

"Good!" cried Neal. "We make it nine hundred and eighty-six feet."

"Ah. That 's really better than I expected," replied Ken. "I can figure out my other triangulation now, with some assurance that it will be nearly right."

This result he shortly announced as eight hundred and ninety-two feet.

"This, of course, is the horizontal distance," he said. "Now we must take a reading and measurement from here to the center of the outcrop at the verge of the cliff, and then we can figure out just where the posts of the claim ought to be placed."

Then turning to Dave, he asked, "Do certificates of location give the accurate direction or course, of the vein?"

"Yes," replied Dave, "they are never supposed to be absolutely correct, but, as I have said, the nearer right a man makes his certificate, the less trouble he may have in the end."

"Well, then, I think I can give the correct course; but I will have to make a little experi-

ment in astronomy first, which I 'll do to-night. I have n't used the magnetic needle at all, as it could n't be relied on here. Neal, which way is north?" he asked.

"North seems to be somewhere about where that notch is, between those two sharp peaks," Neal replied, pointing, as he spoke, with his finger. "I get it from the north star. That will be pretty near right, won't it?"

"Nearly, but not quite," said Ken. Then consulting the needle, he remarked, "According to what you say, this needle does n't point within thirty degrees of true north. There 's some attraction here from mineral; which makes a compass needle of no use at all."

The boys then went about resetting the corner-posts according to Ken's directions.

"Allowing a fraction for what we may need down below, we will let this claim run back from the edge five hundred and seventy-five feet. This will make nine hundred and twenty-five feet in the opposite direction, or down to the creek," he said. "I suppose the two southerly end-posts of this claim will also be the northerly end-posts of the other one?"

"Yes, that 's the better way; and it 's the way an 'extension' is usually made," said Dave.

This being accomplished, Ken set about preparing for his evening "observation."

He obtained from Neal two small pieces of box-cover. In one he cut a long, narrow slit about a sixteenth of an inch wide, and this piece he nailed perpendicularly to the other piece, which he laid flatwise. The flat piece could thus be shoved along a table and the slit would remain upright.

Then he took a pole, and attaching a string and plumb-bob to the top end, planted it in the ground so that the top of the pole leaned two or three feet to one side. He placed a pail filled with water directly underneath the top of the pole, so that the plumb-bob hung suspended within the water, which made the line steady. This completed his preparations until it became time for "business," he said.

After the pleasant exercise of supper had been disposed of, Ken borrowed Neal's table, and with Phil's assistance made its top quite level, placing it as nearly due south of his plumb-line as he could judge. Then laying upon the table the contrivance with the vertical slit, he said he was all ready.

"The thing is perfectly simple," he said to the other boys. "I presume you all know that the

pole-star makes an apparent revolution, or path, around the true north point, and all that 's necessary is to make your observation at the right moment. That is, when the pole-star is on the meridian, and before it passes to the east or west of it. Now, science has learned that the star Alioth (the star in the handle of the dipper that is nearest to the bowl) also crosses the true meridian practically at the same time as Polaris. Therefore, it 's only necessary to set your marks when one star is directly above the other and you have your north-and-south line."

Ken's description made this matter much clearer to the boys than it ever had been before, and as the evening wore along he showed them the actual practice of the test by frequently pushing his upright slit along so as to always have it in line with both the plumb-line and the pole-star. Meanwhile it was necessary for one of the boys to hold a candle so that its light would shine upon the plumb-line and enable it to be seen.

Finally he announced that the plumb-line showed Alioth to be directly below Polaris, and ordered two stakes driven in the ground — one close to the table and the other at about two hundred feet distance — and the meridian was established.

CHAPTER VII.

NEAL'S "BLOW-UP"—THE SICK STRANGER.

After breakfast the following morning, Ken put the finishing-touches to his work of the evening before by connecting his meridian line with the center-line of the claims. This was quickly accomplished by setting up the compass at the meridian and sighting to the center-line and reading the angle, then resetting his instrument at the center-line post and sighting back to the meridian line and reading the angle of deflection. This gave him the true course of the vein (and of the claim) quite independently of the compass-needle, which could not be relied upon.

It had been arranged that Neal and Ken were to go down into the valley to set the necessary corner-posts there, while Dave and Phil would remain in camp and devote their attention to putting the assay furnace into working order.

As Ken and Neal walked down the trail together, Ken remarked: "From the mountain top over yonder, where we strayed to, day before yesterday, this place looks perfectly inaccessible.

You must have had hard work to make the trail as good as it is."

"It was *almost* inaccessible till we made the trail," replied Neal. "I came up alone first, when I was tracing the vein, and there were places where 't wasn't any easy job for me to get over. I call myself pretty spry too. After I found the vein and went back again, it took Dave and me three solid days before we could get the jacks over.

"We 've done some work on it since then too. That reminds me of something! I 've always intended to explore the wall of the mountain on the farther side of the plateau. Maybe 't would have been easier to get up and down from that side than this. Don't make any difference now, I s'pose, but it 's well enough to know how the land lies; considering that we might have visitors some time."

"Have you seen any people since you came in here?" Ken inquired.

"No, not a soul. There are men not many miles away, though; because I 've seen smoke from their fire, 'way up high among the hills to the north. I thought I heard a man shout, one day, too, when I was coming up the trail, but I could n't see any one."

"You say we might have visitors," said Ken.

"Do you think there are men in the mountains who would really try to disturb us in our rights here?"

"I 've no reason for saying there 's any such men hereabouts, now," replied Neal, "but that 's the history of every mining district in the Rocky Mountains. I 've had my own experiences in being 'jumped.'

"One of them — my first one, in fact — is kind of amusing to think about now, although I could n't see anything so very comical about it at the time."

"What was it? Are you willing to tell the story?"

"It was the year I came out West; when I was nothing but a youngster, rather green, but plucky enough; the sort they raise in and around the lumber woods of Maine and Canada.

"I struck a small camp over near Eureka, Nevada, where everybody was going daft about the prospects. I hung around a few days, with nothing to do, when a man came up to me and asked if I did n't want a good all-winter job, good pay and not much to do.

"I was n't lazy, but the promise of good, steady pay was enough, so I said 'Yes,' mighty quick. Then he told me he had a claim up in the mountains, and was obliged to go away East

for a while, and would be willing to pay good wages to have it held for him. He said he spoke to me because he thought my face showed that I was honest and would n't be easily scared.

"Well, I struck a bargain with him right away. He gave me a lot of instructions, told me how to find the place, and gave me money enough to stock up with provisions for six months. There was a good log cabin on the claim, he said, and the kind of talk he gave me sort of made me proud; so when he gave me the key and shook hands with me I started off, saying to myself that I was going to show him that he had n't made any mistake in his man.

"I found the place all right, got my grub in, and made everything as tidy and comfortable as I could. There was n't anything to do, as one man could n't work in a shaft alone, so I used to wander around the hills a good deal, hunting and exploring.

"One day, just as I was getting back to the cabin, I found two men sitting beside the trail, a little way from the door.

"As I came up one of them snarled out, 'Say, who be you, and what ye doin' 'round here, anyhow?

"I did n't like his way of speaking, and I did n't like the cut of either of 'em very well, so

I said, 'Maybe I 've a better right to ask you that question, but your looks are enough for me. I don't want to know anything about you,' and I walked right past 'em toward the cabin.

"At that they both called out, 'Hold on there, young feller!'

"I turned, and the other man spoke up, saying, 'Don't you ride any high-steppin' horse past us, or you 'll have trouble a'plenty. The duffer what sent you up here jumped this claim. It 's our 'n, and we want you to chase yerself out o' here double quick.'

"That statement kind of staggered me, because I could n't know but what it might be true. But I answered him back, 'You say it 's your claim. How did it come to be yours?'

"'It 's our 'n 'cause we located it first,' he replied.

"'Oh! you did?' said I. 'Did you build this log shanty?'

"'No, the jumper put it up,' he growled.

"'He did, eh?' I said. 'Well, did you sink that shaft? and are there any corner-posts anywhere around here that you set up?'

"Either the questions or else my sarcastic way of talking made him wild, and he yelled, 'We ain't goin' to fool with you, nor take any cheap talk! You pack up an' git out o' here, or we 'll

fix you. We 'll give ye jest two days to do it in!'

"I felt pretty sure now that they were rascals, and as I was n't a bit scared I answered, 'Thanks for the two days, but I 'm going to need a little more time than that. In fact, I 'm going to stay here all winter; and now, if you 've got yourselves all rested, you can hit that trail, and do it hard and quick. You 're not ornamental enough for my front dooryard!'

"They both jumped to their feet then, and made some show of reaching for their revolvers, but I tapped the stock of my Winchester kind of careless-like, and with my left hand pointed down the trail.

"They did n't stop to argue, but hustled off, and just before disappearing from sight in the brush turned and screamed, 'Mind! We 'll fix you!'

"I did n't really expect any trouble, but I kept about the claim somewhat closer for a while, and for two or three weeks I did n't even know who the fellows were.

"One day I ran across them down at the camp, and found, by inquiring, that they did n't seem to have any friends except among the toughs, so I did n't bother my head about 'em any more.

"One night, maybe about ten days after this,

I was sound asleep in my bunk when there came a paralyzing crash and roar. The cabin seemed to be lifted into the air, everything in it scattered to the four winds, and as for me, I thought — as far as I was able to think at all — that my brains went one way and fragments of my body another. I lost my senses for a while, and when I came to I lay helpless.

"Gradually I began to pull myself together, and found that although I had bruises and cuts all over my body from my face downward, I 'd got through without any real bad hurt.

"The cowards had blown up the cabin with giant-powder. Lucky for me, though, they did n't know what corner my bunk was in, and they did their sneaking work at the opposite end from me.

"It was a beautiful wreck. The stove, and most everything else, was smashed into scraps, and what was left of the cabin was just about standing on end.

"When I dragged myself down to the camp next day, and put myself on exhibition, there was a mad lot of men. The coyotes had skulked away, though, and could n't be found anywhere in the country. So the boys had to be satisfied with clubbing together and helping me to rebuild the cabin and straighten everything up."

"Did you ever see or hear anything of the fellows, afterwards?" asked Ken.

"No, not a thing. I hungered and thirsted to find 'em for a long time, but years ago I made up my mind to forget about it. There ain't any sense in running 'round looking for trouble. It 's apt to come fast enough all by itself."

Arriving at the dead jack-pine it took but a short time for Ken to figure out the location of the posts, and they were quickly set.

Then he took a few bearings with the compass to prominent objects, and after posting the claim notice at one of the corners, they returned toward camp.

They walked at a moderate pace, chatting as they went, about the risks and experiences of the miner's life, so that time passed rapidly and the way seemed short.

They had left the valley, and were more than half-way up the trail toward camp, when Neal, who was slightly in advance, paused, exclaiming, "Hello! What 's this?"

Ken looked up the trail, then answered, "Why, it 's one of the boys! Can anything have happened at camp?"

After a slight pause Neal returned, "No, it ain't one of our boys. It 's a stranger."

Sitting in the trail some distance ahead, and above them, was a man.

Whether he had seen the two persons approaching was uncertain. But as they looked he seemed to drop into a recumbent position and to writhe as if in intense pain.

"Something has happened to him," said Ken. "Let 's hurry and see if we can be of any help!"

They soon reached the place and found a rather small, black-bearded man lying at full length and motionless, but uttering occasional deep groans.

Neal touched him on the shoulder saying, "What 's the trouble, friend?"

The man opened his eyes for a moment, but gave no indication of consciousness.

Ken then shook him slightly, crying, "Are you hurt? Is there anything we can do for you?"

After staring at Ken for a minute he seemed to try to speak, as he moved his lips, but the sound was unintelligible.

"Can't you sit up?" asked Neal, at the same time trying to help him to partially rise, but the man sank back, almost as though unwilling to be helped.

"I can't make out yet," said Neal, "whether he 's been hurt, or is sick, or is just a plain looney. What do you make of him, Ken?"

"Being where he is, the most natural thing is to suppose he has been hurt, but his symptoms look more like sickness. I don't see any marks. Do you?"

"No, there 's no bones broken. What do you think we ought to do with him?"

"I hardly see yet," replied Ken. "Perhaps we would better wait a little while to see if he does n't come back to consciousness."

"What plagues me is to understand what he is doing here on our trail," said Neal. "He was either going toward our camp or else coming from there. But what for? Can you imagine?"

"No; that 's beyond me. It 's very peculiar. Maybe he will tell us himself. He begins to show some signs of knowing something."

The man seemed to be struggling to sit up, so both of our friends lent their assistance, and presently he stammered, "What 's the matter? Who are you?"

"We can introduce ourselves if it will help things along any, but, my dear boy, we can't tell what 's the matter. In fact, we had some hopes you would do that," said Neal.

"I 'm sick! Awful sick!" the man groaned.

"If we can do anything for you, we will," said Ken. "Where did you come from? and how did you get up here on this trail?"

"He moved his lips but the sound was unintelligible."

"Let 's see. Where be I? O, yes. Now I know! I come from Bald Eagle. I 've got a pardner somewheres this way, an' I 'm tryin' to find him. I heerd he was on the head of Porph'ry Creek. I 've ben sick most the way up. I seen this trail an' come along up here, but I felt awful bad an' set down. That 's all."

He told this with frequent catches of breath and seeming spasms of pain.

"Well, that seems a straight story," said Neal, "and I guess you 're playing in pretty hard luck. We 'll have to get you to camp somehow, and maybe we can fix you up a little. It seems, Ken, that he must have struck our trail after we turned away from it to go up the valley."

"Yes, of course. The next thing now is the question of how we are going to get him up. Do you think you can try to walk?" he asked of the sick man.

"I 'll try. I 'm feelin' better, some. Mebbe I won't get faint any more."

They assisted him to his feet and started, the sick man walking slowly between Neal and Ken.

"I 'm pretty rocky," he said, "but I guess I kin go it, slow. Hope I ain't goin' to have mountain fever."

Pausing now and then, they made their way

upward and along the trail, the man seemingly gaining more strength as they advanced.

As it was only about a mile and a half to camp, they reached there in little more than an hour, and the invalid was made comfortable in one of the tents. He had, meanwhile, as they reached the plateau and neared the camp, looked about him with evident but somewhat languid curiosity.

Neal left him, saying cheerfully, "A hot drink and a nibble of dinner will help you along some, I think. I 'll look over the bill of fare."

Dave and Phil were full of curiosity over the new arrival, and Ken was explaining how they had picked him up.

"He looks harmless," Dave said, "and of course there was nothing to do but take him in. I hope we won't have very many callers yet awhile, though."

"No fear, Dave," returned Neal. "There 's not very many of 'em in these parts. I guess if this fellow was n't a little weak under his hat — as well as in his legs — he would n't be here, either. How do you come along with the assay rigging?"

"We 've got it all nicely into shape, and our test-ore all powdered too. We 've also opened up the charcoal pit I started last week. There 's some of the stuff. Pretty good coal, is n't it?

We 'll have dinner, and then go ahead with the tests. Dinner 's all ready, and I 'm cook to-day, but I 'm in no danger of being spoiled by your flatteries. Whenever we want to give a swell dinner party, Neal is the man to act as *chef*."

Before seating himself, Neal carried a liberal allowance of food to the sick man, who remarked, "I'll eat just a little. Don't feel much like eatin'."

While the boys sat at table Dave explained his idea of the chief need for an assay in a case like theirs.

"It might seem," he said, "as if it were n't necessary to bother ourselves about how many dollars each cubic foot of ore as rich as this will yield. That part of the matter would be taken care of when the ore goes to the mill. But it 's not wise to work in the dark when you 're able to have a light.

"Neal and I several times have tried crushing the ore, weighing the samples, and washing them in a pan. In this way we have not been able to get a result higher than six or eight dollars to the pound of rock, nor an average of more than four or five dollars.

"Now, we are sure that it's a good deal richer than this, and that a large percentage of the gold is in the form of a brittle telluride, which, when it is pulverized, washes away with the sand.

The reason why we are sure of this is that we have made some crude attempts at roasting the ore to drive out the tellurium. When we roast and *then* wash it we get larger results. But to give real satisfaction we must have a smelting-test, or assay. A careful assay will give us valuable knowledge in several directions. Not only how rich the ore actually is at present, but (what is most important) will give us better ideas of how the vein is likely to continue.

"The proportion of 'free' gold to that which is contained in the tellurides is one important matter. If the tellurides run high, there is a larger probability of the vein holding out rich than if most of the gold is free. Then, too, there are various forms of tellurides, and most of them contain silver. There is, probably, silver here, but for my part I hope there is n't much. The ore will be more promising, and besides, will be more easily milled if it runs light in silver.

"There may also be sulphides. At present I can see little more than a trace, but this may change, and in that case the whole character of the mine changes."

"How will it change, Dave?" asked Phil. "Will it be unfavorable?"

"It will not be favorable. The usual form of gold sulphide is iron pyrites, and it is not a good

ore to treat. Knowledge of how to mill these ores is increasing, but the subject is still a good deal of a problem. Quartz containing sulphide is very apt to be hard and heavy too, and therefore expensive to mine as well as to mill. The most desirable thing is ore rich in tellurides, or (of course) free gold, but, in my judgment, our best hope is tellurides."

"Well, here 's to Mr. Tellurium!" cried Phil. "May his tribe increase and wax fat!" and he held up his tin cup of coffee.

All drank, the dinner was ended, and Dave went about his task.

Neal looked in upon the sick man and found that he had finished every scrap of the bountiful dinner he had carried to him.

"I guess our patient will come around if we give him time, Ken," he remarked. "He 's polished off the tin dishes till they shine."

"Perhaps it was hunger that ailed the poor fellow," said Ken.

"Well, I don't know. Maybe," was the reply.

CHAPTER VIII.

RESULT OF DAVE'S ASSAY.

"The first thing to do," said Dave, "is to fire up the furnace. It will take a little while for it to come to a proper heat. I hope it is n't going to rain. It might spoil our efforts," and he looked at the sky.

"Maybe I can fix a roof that will shed rain for a little while," said Neal, "by hoisting a canvas pack-cover on poles."

This he succeeded in doing very neatly in a short time, meanwhile remarking, "We 've got to build a house soon as we can get around to it. I guess we four ought to be able to run it up in quick time."

By the time Neal had finished his roof Dave had his powdered ore, or "pulp," all prepared and weighed, and upon inspecting the furnace he pronounced it hot enough for business.

"I may have to try a number of times before I hit it just right, but we should n't be satisfied with one test, even if we don't meet with any accident."

The boys were all watching his work with the keenest interest, and Ken asked, "Shall we bother you any, Dave, if we stand around and watch you? We 're all full of curiosity."

"Oh! no. Not a bit," replied Dave. "I 'll try and explain the process as we go.

"There are several ways of making assays," he continued, "but the process known as 'scorification' is as good for our needs as any, and is much the simplest. So we will use it."

"Why is it called 'scorification,' Dave?" asked Phil.

"I hardly know, unless the man who gave it the name had the first chance at the word. It is evidently from 'scoria,' and indicates that the result is obtained from a fusion of substances, but many other methods are equally so. It 's merely a name.

"First, we 've got to roast our sample. We do this to prevent a loss of gold or silver through volatilizing—"

"Tut, tut, Dave! Twist the brakes a little there!" cried Neal. "Just wait till I get out my dictionary, will you!"

Dave laughed gaily, and said, "Well, I 'd have given you a shorter one if it were capable of doing the work, but there is n't any that I know of. You shouted a little too soon. I was

just going on to say that when you melt up your ore without first driving out certain elements, such as zinc or sulphur, or antimony (which are pretty sure to exist there in some proportion) the intense heat operates upon them all so quickly that they are likely to carry off some of the gold or silver in the fumes. We call it 'volatilizing,' and this can be prevented by driving out these elements first with a moderate heat."

"Oh! I understand now, and I apologize," said Neal.

"Never mind the apology," replied Dave, smiling. He then resumed, pausing between each of the stages of his work:

"The roasting is best done by placing the ore upon an iron pan like this, which we coat all over with chalk and then sprinkle with the powdered ore and place it inside the muffle."

"What 's the muffle, Dave?" asked Neal. "Is it the oven?"

"Yes, it 's a sort of oven. It 's made of fire-clay, so that the coal fire may come in contact with it on every side, and thus generate an intense heat within. It 's perforated, you see, with only very small holes, to allow the fumes to escape."

Dave now placed the pan containing the powdered ore inside the muffle, leaving the door

open so that he could keep it constantly stirred, and it gradually came to a full red.

"You see now," he said, "that the fumes have ceased to rise from the ore, so I 'll take the pan out.

"The next thing to do is to mix the ore with this granulated lead, called litharge, using twenty parts of lead to one of ore, and put the mixture in this small fire-clay cup called a scorifier. I then cover the charge over with twenty parts more of lead, and lay a little borax glass on top of the whole. This completes the charge.

"Now I put the scorifier inside the muffle and close the door. The lead melts very quickly, so I will have to open the door and you can see the ore on the surface of the lead. You see there are fumes rising. The first are from the tellurides and the silica (or quartz), and the later ones are from the lead. The lead fumes are a clear white.

"Now the colors change and become variegated, and you see there 's a large bright bead dancing on the surface inside the ring of darker material.

"Now I 've got to lower the heat slightly, and as the heat grows less, you see that the slag closes over the top of the bead.

"The next thing is to raise the heat again,

and this time we must make it fierce and roaring for a minute or two, after which I will take the scorifier out of the muffle."

When Dave had done this, and allowed it to cool for a few moments, he took the button out and hammered it, so as to detach the brittle slag, or refuse portion.

"Now," he said, "what we 've got here is a lead button, in which is contained all the gold and silver, and nothing else.

"First, we have got to get rid of the lead, and afterwards separate the gold from the silver.

"In disposing of the lead so as to leave the gold and silver free, we use a process called 'cupelling.'

"The cupel is a small shallow cup, shaped, outwardly, like a section of a cylinder. It is made of bone-ash, and so porous that it will absorb its own weight of lead."

"What 's the meaning of the word 'cupel,' Dave?" asked Phil.

"I don't know. Perhaps Ken can tell us," he replied.

"I think," said Ken, "it 's from the French *coupelle*, for little cup."

"Good! That 's plain enough."

"This operation of cupelling," resumed Dave, "is more of a mechanical process than chemical.

Under a melting heat the porous bone-ash of the cupel simply absorbs the lead and leaves the button of gold and silver free, somewhat as a blotter will absorb water and leave sand.

"The muffle is good and hot now, so I select a clean cupel, place it inside, and watch it until the muffle is at a white heat and the cupel is of a bright cherry red. Now I take up the button with my tongs, place it gently in the cupel, and close the door.

"The lead melts very quickly, so I must open the door to keep the heat down. You see, there are luminous flashes passing over the button, and it seems to be revolving from the center outward. The button is growing smaller and more round, and in a minute more the lead will all be absorbed by the cupel."

"Is n't it beautiful!" cried Ken. "It gives out prismatic hues like a diamond."

"Yes," said Dave, "this is called 'brightening the button,' and it 's a critical stage. If it gets too hot, some of the mineral might pass away in vapor. I have placed another cupel in the furnace and I will now invert it over the bead, to prevent it from 'spitting.'

"I believe our cupelling is a success."

After waiting a few moments Dave withdrew the cupel and easily removed the smooth, well-

rounded bead. He brushed it carefully with his button-brush, weighed it upon a pair of delicate scales, and recorded the weight.

"The whole of our gold and silver is in this bead (or ought to be)," he said. "The only thing to be done now is to separate one from the other."

Dave then took the bead and flattened it with his hammer, making it as thin and uniform as possible, and placed it in a porcelain dish. Then he poured diluted nitric acid over it until the button was covered, and placed the dish over the fire, where he allowed it to remain until it came to a moderate heat.

"Nitric acid will absorb silver very readily, but will not act on gold," he said.

After a minute or two Dave removed the dish and poured off the acid. Then he repeated the process, but made his acid somewhat stronger than before.

After he had again poured away the acid he said, "All that 's left in the dish now is gold. It looks black and tarnished, and is in irregular grains, so I will first dry it over the fire, and then I will have to cupel it again with lead, after raising the muffle to a white heat. The second cupelling is merely to condense the grains into a single bead, and also to brighten it."

When Dave had finished doing this he said, as he took up the yellow shining bead and dusted it with care, "Now we 've got the actual result in gold. The silver has all been poured away in the acid. I will weigh the bead, and when we subtract the figures from those I set down before we shall have the weights of both the silver and gold."

Meanwhile the boys were watching and listening to Dave with eager interest.

After weighing the little button with his delicate scales, Dave figured for a few minutes, went over his work again to check it, and then announced in a gay and exultant voice: "Boys, if the sample we took was a fair average one, the stuff runs about twenty-seven thousand dollars to the ton in gold, and less than a hundred dollars in silver."

There was a shout of rapture from the other three, and Phil cried, "Does that mean, then, Dave, that from a third to a half of the gold is in the form of tellurides?"

"Yes, Phil. If my assay is right, it means just that," he replied. "It means, too, that we could hardly ask for anything more favorable. But I 'm not going to rest satisfied with this test. I 'm going to pulverize some other pieces, picking out those that don't show so much free gold.

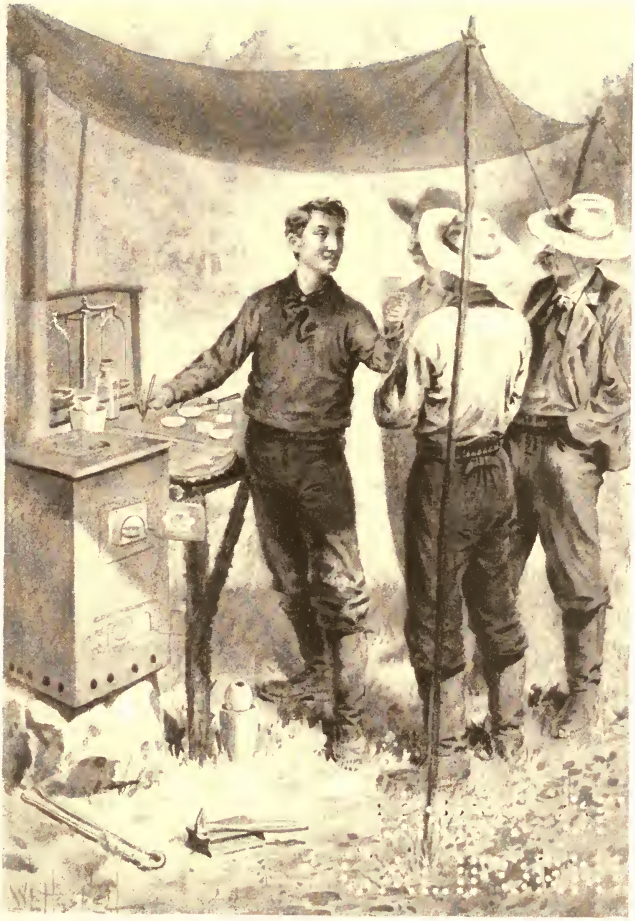
I shall make several tests and then I will feel safer."

"For my part," shouted Phil, "I feel safe enough to turn hand-springs! If I were out of everybody's sight that 's what I would be doing. Say, Neal, what do you think about the mine now?"

"I 'm feeling mighty happy, Philip. I 'm ready to believe Dave's assay is all right, because I thought the tellurides must be rich, though, of course, I could n't be *sure* of it. We might better go slow a bit, even yet. There 's a *chance* of a mistake, and 'there 's many a slip,' you know."

"Well, boys, I feel a good deal as Phil does," remarked Ken, "but I know something that perhaps will make a fair substitute for hand-springs. While Dave is working here let 's go and finish up the surveying. When we 've got our certificates of location all fixed up and properly recorded, I 'll feel as though we have done what we ought, and not till then."

"That 's the right way to talk," returned Neal. "Always keep your business well in hand, and you need n't feel much afraid of slips. But how do you s'pose, Ken, you 're going to carry the line up over the other cliff? Will you triangulate, same as you did before? Jiminy!



"If the sample was fair the stuff runs $27,000 in gold."

Come to think of it, I don't believe our extension claim will reach clear to the top, anyway, and it 's mighty certain we can't climb to any place part way up and put in corner-stakes. The face of the mountain above here is a good deal steeper than 't is below."

"How wide is this shelf, Neal?" asked Ken.

"It must be close to fifteen or sixteen hundred feet. Our first claim runs back five hundred and seventy-five feet, so that one thousand feet of the extension claim will (as I figure it) take us to our tunnel, and the last five hundred feet will carry us just that much up the mountain, or inside of it, whichever way you like to call it."

"Oh! well, then, if that 's the case," replied Ken, "it will really make our work very much easier than I supposed it would be. We shall only have to set our posts at the foot of the cliff, and mark them as 'witness-corners.' The notes will then explain that the true corners cannot be set because the mountain is inaccessible."

"Well, it won't take long to do that," returned Neal. "We can have it all done and you can fix up your notes for filing and be ready for supper before Dave is."

This turned out quite as he said; so that when Neal gave his cheery call of "Supper! Ho!"

the survey had long been finished, Ken had completed his notes, and Dave was just giving the last touch to the figures of his assay tests.

"How 's our patient, Neal?" asked Ken as they sat at table.

"I 've just taken his supper to him," replied Neal. "He thinks he feels pretty bad yet, and could n't come out and eat with us. I thought I saw him out once this afternoon, but I was busy and did n't take much notice."

"He seems to me a queer case. Don't you think so, Neal?" asked Dave.

"Yes; and if I thought he had half as much sense as either Sancho or Teddy, I 'd feel like inviting him to gird up his trousers and hunt for that 'pardner' of his; but I guess he 's a sort of a freak. How did you get on with the assays?"

"I made two more, and both of them from samples that I thought would give the very fairest tests. They were both low in silver, and one showed a little less gold, the other more, than our first assay. The average is fully up to our first test."

"Dave," cried Phil, "let 's have your candid opinion. Don't you think we have a great property here?"

"Yes," replied Dave. "I feel satisfied now

that we 've struck a ledge that is going to show something remarkable."

"Hurrah!" shouted Ken. "Now, what do you say, Neal?"

"I guess we 've got it, this trip, Ken. I 've felt that way for quite a while; but I 've been disappointed so many times, that I wanted to get all the pointers I could before I began to holler very much. I 'll tell you now what I think about the vein, from the standpoint of my experience and small knowledge of rock formations."

"Good! good!" exclaimed the others together. "Let 's have it, Neal."

"Well, let 's clear away the wreck of the supper first," he replied. "I 'll feel easier in my mind if that 's out of sight."

This was soon accomplished, and the boys seated themselves around the fire.

CHAPTER IX.

NEAL'S MINERALOGY.

Neal seemed a trifle embarrassed as he looked around at the boys, who were waiting for him to begin.

"I hope none of you boys will think I claim to know a whole lot about mineralogy," he said. "I 'm only going to tell what I believe; and it 's chiefly on account of things I 've seen."

"Don't be too modest, Neal. We 're all willing to take lessons from you," said Ken warmly.

Neal blushed red with pleasure and embarrassment, and began.

"You may remember that I talked pretty strong the other day about how the vein might disappoint us yet. So it may. We can't, any of us, live long enough to get away from the reach of slips and accidents. What I *believed* then was the same as to-day; only now my faith is stronger. That 's the only difference.

"I 've been afraid you boys were feeling too sure; but I 'm going to let you sing now. The

chances are in our favor, and if we get disappointed in the end, why, we 're strong enough to take the medicine; that 's all.

"Dave and I each have our ideas about the native rock in these parts; and I 'm going to call it quartz-porphyry. I never saw any place where there's been more shaking up and topsy-turvying than right around here. This mountain is full of big dyke fissures, made up of lava that has come up from below and filled the cracks. But it ain't in those dyke veins that we 're to look for the gold, — at least, for very much. It 's silly to suppose that the mineral came up in big chunks or spots along with the lava. You see, there 's a little gold 'most anywhere: in all rocks and in most all water. If you could get down to the interior of the earth, — where maybe it 's all a-fire, and maybe it ain't, — you 'd probably find just as much gold, and no more, than in the average of all rocks here on top.

"When you find it in nuggets and pockets and spattered all through the rock (as ours is), it 's been gathered there afterwards, a little at a time, and from all directions. The rocks everywhere are changing all the time. It takes thousands of years from one change to another; but there ain't any stop to rest, you bet! Nature is a terrible hustler.

"Now, any man who watches and studies the thing can see that whenever you find a real quartz or "true-fissure" vein that cuts right through a lot of different kinds of rock, it 's there you 're liable to find more gold than in uniform rocks. Sometimes you 'll find a little gold in the trap dykes that seem to boil up from 'way below the primeval granite; but when you do, it 's liable to be on the edges. How do you account for it?

"It means that the gold has collected there since the rocks were formed. It has moved toward certain points: has worked and squeezed its way through the little pores and seams of the solid rocks, and was carried along, in solution, by some kind of an acid or mineral salt.

"Now, the quartz veins, where gold is generally found, are simply the places that are most favorable for collecting it. The only way a quartz vein can be compared to a trap dyke is, that both of them are composed of stuffs that fill up gashes in the earth. The dyke is filled with lava from below; but the quartz vein don't go clear down into the original granite at all, and the quartz and other stuff that 's in it came in from the sides.

"Quartz is nearly pure silica in the form of crystals. As silica is the commonest material in

all rocks, it 's natural that the acids, or hot salts, should carry it into the veins first and crystallize it into quartz. The same salts carry along little particles of gold and leave them in the cavities between the crystals.

"By and by (remember, nature keeps things a-moving), maybe another form of salt comes along and acts on these same gold grains, dissolves them, and carries them farther down below, where they are deposited again in larger chunks; and so, you see, we get rich pockets like ours, or the big nuggets that are sometimes found. This work has been going on ever since the world was made: gathering, dissolving, leaching, depositing; and is called by scientists 'lix-iv-i-a-tion.' I love a grand, big word like that. It 's one of the finest I ever knew. You see, when you throw it out, sort of careless-like, people respect you. They don't know what it means, and think you 're mighty wise. Lix-iv-i-a-tion. Ain't she fine? I got her from Dave."

The boys laughed long and merrily at Neal's droll way.

When they paused, at length, Ken said: "You think, then, Neal, that our vein is more apt to be rich because it cuts through different kinds of rocks?"

"Yes, that 's it. The more, the better, as

long as they 're stratified or metamorphic rocks. You can see, too, why I think we 're fully as apt to find it rich below as above; on account of the lix— the leaching process. Its effect on gold, though, don't seem to reach only to a certain depth."

The boys were warm in their praises of Neal's way of setting forth his ideas.

Ken exclaimed: "Neal, that 's the clearest and finest statement of the subject I ever heard! I 'm sure it must be right too; and I thank you for it."

Then they drifted into a discussion of what their plan of work would be in the morning.

Suddenly Dave spoke: "What 's that noise, Neal?" as a sound, first a slight jar, as of something falling, then what seemed like a grunted oath, followed by a deep groan, came to their ears.

They were sitting by the fire, in front of the tent, and the sound came from the rear.

All sprang to their feet and ran around to the back of the tent, where they found their invalid, who was struggling to his feet. He had fallen over a tent-rope.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Dave, sharply.

"I wanted er drink o' water an' come over

from th' other tent. I could n't see an' fell over the rope."

Dave and Neal looked at each other. Then Neal said slowly: "Plenty of water 'round here; and it 's cheap; but we don't want people prowling about our camp, even to get a drink. Now, you get back to your tent, and stay there. I 'll fetch you some water."

The man muttered something, and went toward his tent.

"I don't feel very easy about that fellow, Neal," said Dave. "I suppose he 's only unfortunate, but I 'll be glad when he 's gone."

"Well, I feel almost the same way; but he can't be more than half-witted, and can't do us any harm. If 't was n't for that, I would think he 'd been listening."

"I think we can afford to take chances on any injury a poor wreck of a thing like that could do us, even if he has listened," remarked Phil.

"The only thing that bothers me," said Ken, "is to know what we are going to do with him. I don't believe he 's capable of taking care of himself if we turn him loose. In fact, we *must n't* send him away alone until he is much better than he is now. He might wander off and die."

"Let 's hope he will get better mighty soon, then," returned Dave.

They all returned to the fire and sat in silence for some little time, until Neal returned from his errand of water-carrying to the sick man.

"What 's that rattling the supper dishes over there, Neal? Is it a mouse?" asked Phil.

"It 's a mountain rat. Do you know the beast?" Neal replied.

"No. Are there wild rats up here?"

"Yes, they 're wild enough, in one way; but they sometimes get to be a nuisance too."

"Are they at all like our vermin in the towns?"

"No; they don't seem much like rats, except in their size and their way of hanging 'round where people are. They are comical little duffers, and you 'll get well enough acquainted. There 's plenty of 'em around here."

"Say! Fellows! (Excuse me for interrupting, Phil.) What do you think of our going right ahead and filing our location certificates?" interposed Ken.

"I think it 's a good idea to have it attended to and out of the way," said Dave. "It 's quite a task to do it, though. I suppose we will all have to go over to Gunnison; and it will take several days, perhaps, to clean it all up."

"How 's that, Dave?" asked Phil. "Shall we all have to go together?"

"We can't all leave at once. Somebody must stay to watch camp; but, you see, there are two claims to be sworn to, and that means that Neal and Ken must both go. Each claimant ought to have two witnesses, so that, as far as I can see now, it may take the rest of us. How does it strike you, Neal?"

"We 've got to do a little work, first of all," replied Neal. "There has n't been enough development work on claim Number One. We know where the vein is, and all that, but to live up to the law, we must do some work on each claim, locate a 'place of discovery,' and call it a 'discovery shaft' or 'pit' or 'tunnel,' and say at what point on the vein it is. It won't take very long to do that. I suppose the best place to do it is right at the edge of the lower cliff.

"When we 've done this, we might as well go right along and fix up the filing. It 'll be safer. There 's a lot of other things that ought to be done, though, and I sort of grudge the time. We had better do the work on the vein right off, anyway, and then we can decide whether it 's best to attend to the filing first of all."

When they had turned in for the night it needed little more than a comfortable stretching of the limbs, one or two deep, gratified breaths, and one and all dropped quickly away into the land of dreams and sound, refreshing sleep.

CHAPTER X.

THE PASSING OF THE "SICK MAN," AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

The morning came clear, crisp, and fresh as usual, although there had been a slight rain during the night.

Ken and Phil had already begun to shoulder their part of the camp drudgery; so, while Neal and Dave set about making the fire and preparing breakfast, Ken was chopping and carrying wood, and Phil came from the lake with two pails of water.

"I 've found," said Ken, "that, up here in this altitude, the thing for a fellow to do when he gets up in the morning is to hustle around lively for a while, if he wants to feel first rate. When I 've got the blood to chasing itself through my veins, it's perfect happiness merely to draw my breath. The air is better than wine."

"Yes," cried Phil, "and the color and beauty of it! Could the finest description ever written give any idea of such a combination as that? Look, Ken! The sun is right behind old

Grizzly, and over beyond he has spread a wash like brilliant metal all over the side of Maroon and Snow-Mass peaks. And then the effects of the flying white clouds overhead and that purple mist down below."

"Yes, Phil, I think I shall never grow tired of it. It always seems as if I had never lived until I came to the mountains."

"Breakfast!" shouted Neal. "I guess I 'll see, first, what sort of an order I must send in to the 'nursery' this morning."

"Hello!" he called, as he re-appeared from the other tent. "Have any of you boys seen the infant? He ain't here."

"Why, no!" they answered, one after another. Where do you suppose he is?"

"He has n't been around here since we got up, and must have left the tent before daybreak," said Ken. "I 'm afraid he 's wandered away in another fit of delirium, and something happened to him."

Neal, meanwhile, was looking at the ground, and walking in the direction of the trail.

"Go ahead with breakfast, boys," he called. "I 'll be back in a few minutes."

So they sat down, Dave remarking, "I 've been almost afraid you fellows would think me harsh and ungenerous toward that man; but,

from the very first, I could n't help thinking he seemed like a fraud. I could see that Neal felt the same, — as far as his instinct went, — but he sympathized with the fellow's apparent weak mind."

"Then do you think, Dave, that he has been shamming?" asked Phil.

"Yes, that 's just what I think. I believe he had an object in coming here: that he has been spying on us; and that now he has slipped away, taking whatever information he wanted along with him."

"Oh! I can't believe that!" said Ken. "The man was sick when we found him on the trail. You would think so, too, Dave, if you had seen him then. But here comes Neal. Perhaps he has learned something."

"I don't know yet just how it 's going to figure out, but there 's a game in it somewhere, and it ain't a square one, either," said Neal as he sat down. I 've been over to where the trail leaves the plateau, going down along the wall of the mountain, and I can't see any trace of him. The rain of last night washed dirt over the trail, and he could n't get by without leaving foot-marks; so he did n't go down that way, — at least, since the rain."

"Then he has wandered out in the night,"

cried Ken, "and may have fallen into the lake, or over the cliff! We must look for him."

"Yes, we 'll look for him," said Neal, between his sips of coffee, "but I 'll offer big odds that we don't find either him or his remains."

"What do you think, then, Neal?" asked Phil.

"I think he 's left us by some other way," was the reply.

"But there is no other way."

"I 'll know for certain about that, Phil, after I make a careful examination. There 's three or four things possible. He may have walked over the cliff in the dark: he may be here yet, or he may have gone down the trail in the night, before it rained, or — he 's found another way to get down. The last is what I'm betting on."

"It does n't seem reasonable that he could have gone about here in the night, or before daybreak, and found something that we 've never discovered in the weeks we 've been here, Neal," said Dave.

"Say, fellows!" interposed Phil. "The thought strikes me just now that we were so intent upon our work yesterday, — and we were away part of the time, too, — that the fellow had chances enough to slip into the bushes. He might have spent most of the afternoon exploring the shelf."

"You 've hit the nail on the head, Phil," said Neal, as he rose from the table. "I feel pretty sure I know just what he did, and almost how he did it. If you boys feel like going to work on the new shaft, I 'll go out on a little still-hunt; and I 'll bring you some news before long. Oh! ain't I ashamed of myself, though? I 've always thought I had as big a brain-pan as an average Digger Injun; but here 's this little sneak we 've tucked up in bed and fed with a spoon, that 's all the time been laughing at us for a lot of coddles and weak sisters. It makes life a burden."

He took his rifle from the tent, and vanished among the bushes.

Then the boys seized each a shovel or a pick, and went vigorously to work upon the new shaft, or "open-cut," as Dave termed it.

Little was said for an hour or more; all being engrossed with their work and with their own thoughts.

At the end of that time Neal returned, carrying something white in his hand. He passed it to Ken, who saw it was a handful of scraps of paper.

"Where do you suppose I found these, Ken?" he asked.

Ken turned them over in his hands, and then exclaimed in astonishment, "It 's my location certificate! Why, they 're both here!"

"Where did you get them, and who tore them up?"

"The most interesting part of it is the place where I found 'em. You would n't guess, because none of you have been there. I found the pieces over in the far corner of the plateau, beyond the lake.

"Now you can guess who tore them up. We 've been so busy since we struck our ledge that we 've never explored the neighborhood, small, even, as 't is. I 've always thought there might be a chance to get up and down by way of the northwest wall, but, besides being busy, it has n't seemed easy to get over there. The lake and the outlet — you know — cut the plateau right in two. There ain't very much ground over there, 'specially beyond the ridge of rocks that 's next to the lake and the upper cliff.

"Well, I struck off towards the lake from here, and followed the edge around till I came to the outlet. Something made me think our 'sick man' had gone that way when he said 'by-by.' When I got to the creek I followed it down a little piece, when I came to a dead pine that 's only just dropped across, because I know 't was n't there a few days ago.

"You see, this blooming babe we 've been nursing here took a stroll yesterday, found a

dead tree that he could push over, and kept going right along. He crossed on his bridge, scrambled through the brush and over the rocks to the far end, and there he found a chance to get away from here on that side."

"It does n't seem possible!" said Phil. "From the other side of the valley it looks like a sheer wall."

"It ain't any stage road, nor even a burro-path; but there 's a chance for a good man to get up and down; right along the face too. I ain't sure but there 's a better natural show for a trail, even, than where ours is. Anyhow, he took it, this morning, and he left the certificates behind him. He threw the pieces into a crevice between two rocks, where I spied 'em and scraped 'em out. I 'm through chattering now. I 'll let the rest of you talk."

There was a blazing fire in Neal's eyes which told of his honest wrath, and Ken thought it was a fortunate thing for their late guest that he had not been overtaken.

"It must be a dreadfully low and depraved nature that could stoop to such means, and I can't understand his object even now," he said.

"His object, Ken, was to find out all about our property," said Dave. "There 's a scheme,

somewhere — and he 's at the head of it — to make trouble for us, provided we have something here that 's worth troubling about. There must be others in it, and I should think they are not very far from here. At least, they have seen our camp from some of the hills, and he came to spy. He knows all about it now."

"But what good can it do him? What did he want to steal our certificates and destroy them for?"

"Oh! I ain't afraid of its doing him any good!" exclaimed Neal. "We 're the discoverers, and we're in possession. What bothers me worst is the thought that he played us so beautifully, and got away. There 's a gang of 'em somewhere, of course; and we will hear from 'em again; but just how, nobody knows."

"I believe I can see through his scheme," said Dave. What would he want of our location certificates but to copy them? His tearing them up proves that. He 's got all the points. He will use our figures and our data, make out new certificates, put in other names, and file on this same property of ours!"

Neal gave a long whistle.

"Dave," he cried, "you 've hit it; sure as you live! If they do that and get in ahead of

us, they can make a lot of trouble, even if we hold possession. They might get a crowd of toughs to swear that they were here first, and we drove 'em off."

"But I never heard of anything so outrageous as that!" cried Ken. "It can't be possible!"

"Many things as bad, and worse, have happened in the mountains," replied Dave. "The thing for us to do now is to hustle. They can't beat us in recording the certificates if we go about it on the run. I 'm sure that 's the trick they will be up to. I don't suppose they will think of such a thing as trying to get the claims away from us by 'jumping.' Do you, Neal?"

"I wish that was the only thing to fear," replied Neal. It would be only fun to have that kind of a brush with the sneaks. We could hold the place against fifty of 'em. No. They won't try that. Not now, anyway."

"For my part," returned Dave, "it would give me more satisfaction now to outwit them than to give them a thrashing. If they force a fight, they can have it, and welcome; but they must take us for a lot of boobies, and I long to show them their mistake."

"Well, I don't want to seem selfish and grasping," said Neal, "but I 'm going to dare hope for both. Now, then; let 's to work!" We

will finish up the open cut, and lay our plans for to-morrow. We 've got to act quick as well as careful."

Before noon they had removed the earth from the top of the vein for a considerable space. A charge of giant-powder was then exploded, which tore loose a quantity of quartz showing free gold, and their labors in this spot were, for the present, concluded.

At the noon hour a council and comparison of notes was held, with the result that it was decided to have three of the party proceed to Gunnison, one remaining to guard the camp.

Dave insisted on remaining alone, although under strong protest from the others.

He said, "There will be no use, I think, in making the trip with fewer than three persons. Neal and Ken have each got to file their own certificates, and will need two witnesses. I think now that each can witness for the other, and Phil will be second man, to act for both claimants. As for my staying here alone, it 's not a serious thing, even if it is a little lonesome. I will get along all right, and there 's plenty of work to keep me busy."

"All the same, I don't like the idea," said Neal, "but I s'pose it 's got to be,— for this once. What will you drive at while we 're away?"

"At the noon hour a council was held."

"I can work in the tunnel, although I can't accomplish very much there alone; I can chop wood, or hunt (we shall need more mutton); or, what I prefer doing is to work at building a house. If you are gone long enough, and I can get the jacks to do such mean work as hauling logs, I may have a new residence all ready to move into when you get back."

"No fear of that. We won't be away longer than three days, at the most," said Neal.

"But can you do it within that time?"

"Yes, barring accidents," he said. "Instead of going 'way around, I 'm going *across*,— or try it. I know a notch in the range that will give us a good chance to get over on to the East Fork. I believe we can go through in one day."

In the afternoon Ken prepared new location certificates, which he was easily able to do from the memoranda he had made.

Neal had disappeared from sight immediately after dinner.

In the course of an hour there came reports of four loud blasts, and, shortly, Neal reappeared, remarking, as he laid down his hammer and drill, "The infant won't ever bring his chummies back here by the route he traveled. I 've blown away the whole upper end of the

trail. The only place you need watch, Dave, is our old trail here."

"I 'm glad you did that, Neal," said Phil. It makes me feel easier about Dave being here all alone."

"I don't think there 's one chance in a hundred that there will be a visitor here while we are away," said Neal. "They 've got something else to think of, just now. It 's only the idea, on general principles, of Dave's being alone here that bothers me."

"Don't worry over me, boys!" said Dave. "I shall be all right. Another thing, Neal. You know the provisions are getting low; and it 's just as well to have this filing done now. You can arrange to stock up with everything we want. We shall need a heavy supply, as there are four of us to eat, and we don't want to be bothered with it again for a good while. We ought to plan some other way of getting them here, than with our own burros."

"Yes, I 've been thinking about that, Dave. I don't believe we ought to try to pack stuff in with our own jacks. It would take too much time, and time is too valuable to waste now in driving our animals over to Gunnison. The scheme I favor is, to hire a train of burros, or

mules, and run the stuff all in at one trip. We fellows will talk it over as we go."

Before night everything was in readiness, and at daybreak the following morning the party was on its way down the trail.

CHAPTER XI.

PHIL'S LOST TRAIL — THE AGILE INVALID.

The route Neal had chosen was to leave the trail at the ice bridge and climb the intervening range which separated them from another valley on its easterly side.

This, he said, would give them the advantage of a comparatively straight course and much shorter distance to Gunnison, the county seat.

They made such good progress that long before noon they reached the summit of the divide, and could look far down the valley they were expecting to traverse.

"We 're doing first rate," said Neal. "We'll rest here a little while, and have a bite of lunch. If we can make twenty miles from here before dark, we will strike a road that's good enough to travel on in the night, and ought to take us into Gunnison by nine o'clock. Do you think we 're good for that much of a tramp, boys?"

"I am," said Ken, "and Phil seems to think he is able, generally, to do more than I. Don't spare us. We can follow you."

"All right. We'll sit here long enough to get

our wind into good shape. It will be time well spent," he replied.

"Say, Neal! What kind of an animal is that yonder, among the rocks?" asked Phil.

"The little fellow? O, that 's a coney!"

"A coney? I didn't know there was such an animal in the mountains. I 've read of conies in natural history; and is n't there something in the Old Testament about conies living among the rocks? but I know nothing about them."

"What a strange cry he has," said Ken, as the little animal in question sat erect on his haunches, eyeing the intruders, and cried "skink" in a tone similar to the creaking of a signboard on its rusty hinges. He was smaller than a red squirrel, with no tail worth mentioning, and shaped somewhere between a guinea-pig and a hare.

"He looks just like a hare or a rabbit — or would if his ears were a trifle longer," said Phil.

"That 's the family he belongs to," replied Neal. "He is said to be the smallest of the hares. They live in the rocks and in high altitudes. In fact, the most of 'em I 've seen have been at about the upper edge of timber-line. I 'm told they hide away and go to sleep in the winter,—'hibernate,' I think they call it."

"I wish I could get one, or get close enough to examine it better," said Phil.

"I 'm afraid you won't do either," said Neal. "They are quick as a flash. The only one I ever had in my hand was a dead one I picked up on a hillside, where he had been killed by sliding rock. Try a shot at him with your revolver. You need n't mind about the cruelty of it. He 'll dodge the bullet every time."

Phil was not one of those persons who are governed by the senseless sportsman's instinct to kill any and every wild thing which comes within range, but he was quite interested in the little animal, and really quite anxious to examine it closely, and besides, Neal's remark stirred his pride a little, as he regarded himself a good shot. So, drawing his revolver, and aiming carefully at its head, he fired.

"Go and pick up your game, Phil," laughed Ken.

Phil ran to the spot where the coney had sat a moment before, but nothing was to be seen but a crevice between the rocks, showing which way he had gone.

"Well!" he exclaimed, "that was the quickest somerset I ever saw! In fact, I did n't see it at all. I 'll bet he can't do it again."

He returned to his seat and waited.

In a few minutes there came another faint "skink" from a point a few feet to the right of the previous place, and a head and pair of bright eyes showed themselves.

Taking a still more careful aim, Phil pulled the trigger; but with no other result than before.

"Gracious! Was anything ever so quick? Of course, it 's possible that my bullets went to the side, or above him; but I don't think so."

"No, I believe they dodge at the flash of the gun," said Neal. "At least, I 've never been able to get one. Well, let 's be moving."

"All right, Neal," returned Phil. "You and Ken go ahead, and I will follow you in two minutes. I want to have one more try at that little scamp."

"We are going to walk pretty fast, Phil; so don't loiter," enjoined Ken; and the two started off down the mountain.

Now, whether it was that in his eagerness Phil did not take proper notice of the lapse of time, or merely that he felt undue confidence in his ability to quickly overtake the others, he tried one, two, and three shots in succession. As he had to wait an interval after each shot before the coney reappeared, quite a number of minutes passed by.

"Well, I 've got to give the skeesicks up,"

he said, after the third trial, and thrusting his pistol into his pocket, he started into a run down the slope, in the direction taken by the others.

About three quarters of a mile ahead, and below him, was a broad belt of aspen trees; and thinking Neal and Ken had passed beyond and were obscured from his view by the foliage, he made directly for the grove with rapid strides.

When he emerged from the trees on the lower side, the boys were not to be seen. But failing, in his heat and haste, to take proper notice of the sun as a guide to his course, the thickly standing trees had somewhat confused and turned him about, so that, seeing a ravine directly ahead of him, which sloped away, apparently in the right direction, he plunged into it without hesitation.

He rushed along at a loping gait for some time before he realized that the ravine was growing more and more winding and tortuous, and more difficult to traverse.

Then he stopped with a startled feeling.

"Why! The boys can't have gone down here," he exclaimed. "I believe it 's the roughest traveling on the whole mountain side, and Neal always chooses the best. How can I have made the blunder?"

There was nothing in the surroundings to guide him. The ravine was narrow, with steep sloping

sides, and permitted of no outlook; so, after thinking for a moment, Phil concluded to climb to the ridge on his right.

"I think I 'll be able to see the boys from there; and at least, I 'll find out where I am," he thought.

When he reached the top, he made a careful search in every direction, but the boys were not to be seen.

"Strange," he muttered. "I ought to be able to see them, — even if I am off the track. I don't see the timber along the East Fork now, either. I 'm all mixed up."

Then he remembered that he carried a small compass in his pocket, and opening it, he watched the needle until it settled.

"This is worse yet," he said, growing still more nervous. I ought to be traveling east of south, when, according to the needle, I am going nearly north."

At first he thought the needle must be under some local influence; but after testing it again, he saw by its steadiness that it was unlikely to be very far wrong. Then he began to look carefully about him again.

He was upon a ridge running in a north-and-south direction. Upon his left was the ravine down which he had but just come, and beyond

the wall of its higher ridge was another and still higher ridge, — beyond which nothing could be seen. Upon his right was a ravine, deeper than the one he had left; and looking over and beyond the top of its opposite boundary, he could see a succession of three or four other ridges, trending in a similar direction.

"I don't see how it comes, but there can be only one explanation of it," he thought. "When I came out of the grove, it was upon a spur of the mountain, and I was already turned around. The spur had ravines running in all directions, and I took just the one I should n't have taken. If I 'm going to reach the East Fork, I 've got to turn to the right and cross all these ravines and ridges, or else go back to the tableland from which they start.

"I believe I 'll go back. The walking is n't very bad on the ridge here, although it 's all up hill."

He turned, and walked rapidly in the direction whence he had come, and was thus going southward, as well as climbing higher.

His anxiety lent him strength, and it was not very long before he approached the spur of the mountain that he had left in such haste after emerging from the timber.

Arriving there, he ran to the opposite side,

and at once saw that his conclusion had been right.

The ravines sloped away in the opposite, or southerly, direction, and away in the distance below he could see the line of trees along the East Fork. It seemed that the stream made a long sweeping bend to the eastward, around the base of the mountain.

"I'm still out of the way," he thought. "Neal's route was simply a short and straight cut, and left this spur out entirely.

"He supposed I would have sense enough to see how it was,—and so I ought. I wouldn't blame them if they chipped in and bought me a little dog down at Gunnison, to lead me around with a string."

He turned now to the right, and walked westward along the edge of the shelf.

After a few minutes' walk he arrived at a point opposite where the East Fork turned again in a southerly direction, and concluding now that he could not be very far away from the course the boys had taken, he was upon the point of starting southward along the top of a ridge when he saw something which made him start and then crouch down among the fragments of rock.

Emerging from behind the extreme western

limit of the aspen grove, and some distance from where he stood, was a line of six men. They were walking at a good swinging pace in the direction of the East Fork, keeping in single file, and without conversation.

That which, to Phil, was the most startling feature of the scene was the fact that the leader — who was a small man — was, very evidently, none other than their late guest and invalid.

"Unless my eyes deceive me, this settles the last remaining doubt about him," Phil thought. "Sick man, indeed! He 's as full of jump as a coyote. You 'll have a bad quarter of an hour when Neal gets sight of you, my boy."

He lay flat until the men had crossed the open space, and vanished from view down one of the ravines. Then Phil was seized with a feeling of fear.

"Neal and Ken will be coming back to look for me," he thought, "and are likely to meet this crowd. There will be trouble, and they are only two men against six. If it were n't for my stupid trifling, we should all be a long way ahead, and reach Gunnison before them.

"Oh! if I can only get to the boys now, and do my part, I 'll be willing to fight the whole crowd."

"Sick man, indeed! He's as full of jump as a coyote.

He ran to the place where the men disappeared from sight, and, looking down the ravine, was just in time to see them again vanish around a curve.

"I think our boys must be a little more to the eastward," he thought. "I will keep on along this ridge, just far enough over to be out of view, and perhaps I may get sight of Ken and Neal before they run against these fellows."

But Phil had failed to realize the passage of time, nor — as he had no watch — that it was now long past noon.

The fact was, that Ken and Neal had long ago turned back, and were searching for him through the aspen wood and the ravines leading upward from thence to the point where they had left him.

Phil continued down along the ridge, which grew lower and more sloping, until he at length approached the East Fork.

He was now in advance of the party he had followed, and feeling uncertain of what was best to do, he swerved somewhat to the left, and hid himself in a clump of bushes.

He had not long to wait before the six men filed out of the ravine, and without stopping turned and went on down the bank of the stream.

Phil remained where he was for a time, trying to think out the situation.

"It 's clear enough," he thought, "that the boys have n't met this gang yet, and I feel very certain they are now behind me. They would n't go on beyond this point without turning back to look for me.

"Now, if I start back again to find them, I may miss them entirely,—just as they have missed the toughs. It seems to me, the only thing to do is to wait right here near the stream until the boys get back. They will conclude, after a while, that they have missed me on the way, and that I shall be waiting for them here."

This, in fact, was the way things terminated.

After waiting a length of time which seemed almost interminable, Phil at length saw Ken and Neal hurrying toward him down the same ravine which brought the procession of six an hour or more before.

There were joyful greetings all around, and Ken was almost divided in mind as to whether he would hug or thrash the dear fellow.

Phil began at once, impulsively, saying, "You can't blame me half as much as I do myself. I 'm a trifler and a fool,— but I 'm dreadfully sorry, though. Now, call me mean names!

Don't be backward about it! I need it, and it will do me good!"

"We won't say anything at all, Phil," said Ken. "I've had a great scare, and I'm so happy to see you again that the rest doesn't matter. Neal feels the same way, I'm sure."

"Yes, I do, Phil; sure thing. I can't tell you how glad I am to see you. Why, I was thinking just a few minutes ago, that I'd be even more glad to see you than to see that little duffer that played us off so slick."

Phil and Ken laughed merrily; then Phil said: "Well, I guess it won't be so very long before you see him, Neal. He and the rest of his pals — six of them altogether — went past here down the creek only an hour or two ago. I sat in the bushes and took in the whole procession, from head to tail."

"What's that, Phil? Do you mean they are ahead of us now?" cried Neal eagerly.

"Yes, Neal; and that's what makes me feel so mean. If it wasn't for me, we would be ahead, and get into Gunnison before they do."

Neal's excitement was only indicated by the gleam in his eyes and the way he clenched his hands.

That was over in a minute, and he then said, "I wish we were in the lead of 'em, but maybe

it won't matter very much. They'll get through to-night and we won't; but I think we can get into Gunnison in the morning by the time the registry office is open, and that might be just as good.

"The thing now is to get just as far down the creek as we can before dark. We've lost three or four hours, and we'll have to camp somewhere this side of the stage-road."

Three hours later the party went into camp in a thicket of willows. A bright fire was kindled, their light lunch soon — and all too quickly — disposed of, and then all laid themselves down together, their feet toward the fire, and their weary senses were quickly wrapped in slumber.

At daybreak they were again on their way, and before nine o'clock they were in Gunnison.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FILING — NEAL DELIVERS AN OPINION.

Without pause or delay, the little party made it's way directly to the register's — or county recorder's — office.

"You seem to be familiar with the place, Neal," said Ken.

"O, yes. I know it very well. I ain't been here for two years, though."

Arriving at the door of the office they sought, they were admitted by a tall, rather genial-looking man, who had but just unlocked it.

"Walk in, boys," he said. "It 's a few minutes ahead of office hours, but we won't count it this time."

He stepped behind the railing just as Neal and Ken each produced his certificate, which they handed to him.

He opened one of them, and glanced over it, then, looking up with a quick, surprised air, he looked squarely into the faces of each of the three boys in turn. Then he cried:

"Hello, Neal; old pardner! Is this the way

you come up to your old chums? Without saying ever a word?"

With a short, puzzled look into the recorder's face, Neal answered, "Why, it 's never Archie Campbell?"

"Is n't it, though? Well, then, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it is!" returned the other.

Then both fell to shaking hands in the manner that brother Scotchmen know so well how to do.

"It 's the clean, sleek face, and the long moustache without the whiskers that fooled me, Archie. But why did n't ye speak to me, when it comes to that?" said Neal.

"It must be my thoughts were somewhere away, Neal. Ye hav n't changed any to speak of. But, man! Ain't it the funniest thing? I was thinking about ye only last night; and ye know I have n't seen ye since three years ago, up in the Wind River country.

"There 's something all-'round curious about it. Some fellows blew into the camp last night, and went around the streets inquiring for me. Somebody pointed me out, and a little monkey-faced looking feller rushed up to me, puts two certificates into my hands, and said I must go right over to the office that minute and file 'em.

"I convinced him after a while that the best he could do was to come around this morning at nine o'clock. I glanced over his papers, and they were exact duplicates of these, only the names were different. Probably I might n't have noticed, only as I was reading one I ran across your name, partly scratched out; maybe the feller's ink turned darker on him after he thought he had it fixed. Anyhow, there was your name, 'Neal McInnis,' faint, but quite plain; and under it was another, I forget what.

"I gave him back his papers; and the more I thought about it afterwards, the more it seemed to me there was something that was n't straight. The duffer's queer actions, the hurry he was in, and then your name, impressed me so, that I was thinking of it again when I came in this morning. I s'posed he and his crowd would be here waiting for me when I got around. I guess that 's why I did n't see you at first. I spotted you quick enough, though, when I saw your name here."

The boys, while Campbell had been relating this incident, exchanged smiles of gratification and meaning. Then Neal cried:

"Thank ye kindly, Archie, for your good thoughts! Now, let 's get these things filed and

sworn to, and then, if you 're not too busy, I 'll tell ye all about it."

It took but a few minutes to do this, and both papers were duly witnessed and attested.

"You can get your papers this afternoon, boys," said Campbell. Then opening the gate in the railing, he said, "Come in, all of ye, and sit down. It 's good to see ye, Neal. I 'm glad to meet your friends, Mr. Carter and Mr. Wentworth, too. What 's the racket, anyway? Got some good claims, and these bums trying to jump ye?"

"That 's the idea, Archie," replied Neal, "only they tried to file ahead of us first. We discovered and located the vein, and we 're in possession. We think they meant to swear they discovered it and that we drove 'em off."

"Not a very bad play, either!" cried Campbell. "That is, for cuteness, I mean. But it won't work this time. The evidence is too strong on your side. I know too well the style of man you are; and you and I have too many friends in this camp, old man."

The two old chums shook hands again and laughed.

Just then there was a sound of approaching footsteps, and our three friends hurriedly turned their chairs about, and sat with their backs

toward the door, as six men entered, and Mr. Campbell arose to receive them.

There was not a man among the new arrivals who could be called naturally prepossessing in looks, and matters were made worse by the fact that they all were to some extent under the influence of liquor.

Clearly, they had spent the night in a wild debauch, and had not recovered wholly from the effects.

The leader — a small man — was the most intelligent-looking of them all, but his small-featured face, rendered still more disagreeable by the whisky-drinking, was a decidedly evil one.

"Here 's them certificates," he called out, in a high voice, "and we want 'em filed right off, too! This here 's my claim, an' that 's the extension, owned by my pard, Joseph Helmer. Here, Joe! Come up here an' take care o' yer prop'ty! What ye doin' back there?"

"Your name is Brodie?" asked Mr. Campbell.

"That 's what it is! William Brodie!" said the small man.

"Well, hold up your right hand," said Mr. Campbell. "Now, do you swear that the statements in this certificate are true, so help you God?"

"Yes, sir! I do!" almost screamed Brodie.

"Very well. Now, Mr. Helmer!"

Helmer held up his hand and took the oath in a gruff voice, but not with an air of perfect assurance.

"Now, then, for your witnesses," said Mr. Campbell. "Are these the men?"

"Yes. Come up here, Alf and Tom; and you, Pete and Gus!"

"We will take two of them for each claim," said Mr. Campbell.

The four men testified and affixed their clumsy signatures; and when this was accomplished, after much hard labor, Mr. Campbell said, in a very mild and matter-of-fact voice:

"You ought to have been 'round a little earlier, boys. These same claims have been filed on this morning, by some men who say they are in possession."

"Filed on this morning, you say? You lie!" yelled Brodie.

Campbell turned slightly pale under the force of his wrath, but he answered quietly:

"If you were a complete man, instead of a drunken fraction of one, I 'd adjourn all public biz till we could fix up that little remark. As 't is, you can go on."

This retort was lost upon Brodie, however, who again shouted:

"Who is the dirty thief you 're puttin' up a job with to do me out of my claim? Where is he? Trot him out!"

"Neal!" called Mr. Campbell.

The start which Brodie gave at the sound of the name showed the thinness of his braggart mask.

Neal, with one spring, was at Campbell's side, and another carried him over the railing, where he stood confronting Brodie, who looked as though he might collapse.

"Just how and when was it"— Neal 's voice, as he spoke, had a hard metallic ring which none of the boys had ever heard in it before — "you came to be owner of this claim that somebody 's trying to do you out of? Was it day before yesterday morning, when you stole and ran off with the certificates that belonged to the fellows who had been trying to do the 'Good Samaritan' act for you?"

By this time Phil and Ken were close behind Neal, from whom they fully expected to see some act of violence, knowing of his pent-up anger during the past two days.

In fact, Neal's appearance might well have excited fear in a man with a cleaner record than Brodie's.

The stalwart, blonde-moustached Scotchman with blazing eyes, who towered above the shrinking figure, clearly had enough courage, if not the actual physical strength, to conduct a battle with the full half-dozen.

Ken touched Neal's arm, saying, "Don't hurt him, Neal. We are ahead, and he isn't worth the trouble."

But Neal's self-control was greater than the boys feared.

He said, quietly, but with the same quality of voice as before, "No fear, Ken. This ain't the place for a disturbance. I 'm kind of sorry, too, for the little ape needs a spankin', but I guess I must let him off with a 'suspended sentence,' as the judge says.

"Now, beauty," he said to Brodie, — from whom he had not removed his eyes, — "we 're ahead of you in your own 'brace' game. Our locations are ahead of yours, and are all neat and tidy. Everything with us is straight and truthful, while there ain't a man in this room who don't know that you and all the rest of your sweet cherubs are liable to be sent up for perjury. There 's a hole in the wall right there behind you. If you 'll all throw yourselves out of it, and do it nice and quiet, I 'm sure you 'll oblige

"The start which Brodie gave showed the thinness of his mask."

our friend Mr. Campbell, and the rest of us," and he pointed to the door.

There were dark looks and a display of ugly tempers among Brodie's crew while Neal had been speaking, and it is uncertain how they might have behaved, but just then Campbell spoke, saying:

"There 's our sheriff, Bob Harvey, at the door, so I guess you better hurry along."

At this the whole party moved quickly away.

"Oh, by the way, Brodie," cried Neal as that furious and baffled person was moving after, "Our hospital is closed up and we 've turned it into a tannery. Don't compel us to hang your hide on the bushes!"

Brodie turned and gave Neal a look as malignant as that of a rattlesnake, and one of his dark-faced crew sang out:

"Mind, we 'll fix you."

The sheriff had now entered, and he and Campbell laughed heartily at Neal's energetic language.

Neal turned to Ken, remarking: "I 've heard that voice before. I wonder where."

"What 's the rumpus about, Archie?" asked the sheriff.

Campbell then introduced him to Neal and the two boys, saying:

"Bob, this man Neal McInnis is an old chum of mine, and one of the squarest and most reliable men in all the Rocky Mountains. His two friends are my friends, and I wish you 'd make a note of this thing for future use. It might be needed."

Then he told him briefly the whole situation.

Harvey was a fine, resolute-looking man, and when he turned to our three friends, saying, "I 'll see that these fellows are well watched and kept out of mischief while they are in camp," Phil and Ken felt assured that he not only meant what he said, but that he could be relied upon.

Neal now remarked, "Boys, we 've bothered Archie here for quite a while. I guess we better move along and give him a chance to do some business, and we will hunt up a place where we can get a square meal. We 'll come in for the certificates this afternoon, Archie."

As they went together down the street, Ken said, "It has all gone off in good style, has n't it? I 'm glad we did n't have any trouble with those ruffians. They are a bad lot, and had enough liquor to make them reckless. I would n't feel sure yet of our keeping clear of a fight if the sheriff had n't agreed to look after them."

"Yes," said Neal. "I don't want to have any fight; and now that I 've relieved my mind

to 'em a little, I shall dodge a row if I possibly can. We need n't fear they 'll give us any trouble, I think."

"Do you suppose there 's any likelihood, Neal, that they would lie in waiting for us along the trail as we go back?" asked Phil.

Neal laughed, saying, "Not a bit. One good reason, is, they 'll all be dead drunk before night, and we 'll be out of camp before daybreak to-morrow. They 've started in right for a 'blow-out' that 's likely to last them a week."

At breakfast the question of buying provisions was raised by Ken. All were of the opinion that the present opportunity to lay in a large stock of supplies was one not to be neglected; so the matter was quickly settled, and Phil and Ken began to make out lists of the goods which were needed. In this matter they were almost wholly guided by Neal's suggestions.

Among the commodities set down were, (besides eatables), woolen underwear, stockings, and heavy shoes with hob-nails, a full supply of mining-tools, giant-powder (or dynamite), blacksmithing tools and apparatus, rifle-cartridges, and a large and complete cooking-stove with all its belongings. This was to be carried in sections.

When everything that could immediately be thought of had been jotted down, Neal said,

"This will do until we come to do the buying. Then we 'll think of lots of other things, most likely.

"The first thing to do now is to look up a man who has jack-trains to hire, or wants to take a contract to pack all the stuff. I used to know some fellows here in that line. If we can find the right sort of a man, I think the best scheme will be to make a contract with him. How many jacks do you s'pose it 'll take to pack this list of stuff up to our camp? What do you say, Phil?"

"O, I think it will take quite a lot of them; perhaps twenty," said Phil.

"How many do you think, Ken?"

"Not less than twenty-five or thirty," said Ken.

"If he uses burros," said Neal, "it will take at least forty, and maybe fifty. But if he has mules—and he will use them if he has,—it won't need so many. Perhaps thirty, but probably more. Well, let 's be moving. We 'll have to skirmish pretty lively all day."

Before night everything was arranged.

The goods were purchased and paid for by draft on Ken's bank in Denver; were to be put up in bales and boxes suitable for packing, and to be in readiness for the packers within three

days, when the start was to be made, with four reliable men to take the train through.

Neal gave careful instructions, and also made a diagram of the route.

"That 's well settled," he said. "Now we will go around to get our certificates, and say 'Good-by' to Archie Campbell. I guess we 'll all feel like turning in early to-night, and we want to get a good sleep, as we 're to take the trail before daylight."

They saw nothing of their "rival claimants" during the day; but once, while passing a saloon, they heard loud and bibulous voices, among which they recognized that of Mr. Brodie.

As they were about retiring, Phil said, rather pensively, "I wonder how Dave is getting along."

"I was just thinking the same thing," said Neal. "It 's a sort of wild place up there for a boy to be alone. And yet I only think of it that way because he 's young. I 've been alone myself in such places many times. Dave 's got the best judgment of any youngster I ever knew. He 's careful, there ain't anything that would ever make him nervous or scare him, and besides, he 'll be right around camp all the time.

"He 's a man, every inch of him, and he 'll be all right. I 'll bet he 's kind of lonesome, and will be glad to see us heave in sight, though."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HOUSE THAT DAVE BUILT—THE PACK-RAT.

After his three friends had left camp and vanished down the trail, Dave set about putting the camp in good order.

This was all done by the time that the first gilded and glistening rays of the sun were beginning to dart from behind the rugged peaks to the eastward.

"I 'll go now, and look over the ground that Neal and I selected for our new house," he said.

The plan as agreed upon had been to have a rather long and commodious cabin, so placed that the line between the two claims would pass through the center of it, and by having a partition so divide it that there would be, in effect, a double house; one half of which would be upon Ken's and the other half upon Neal's claim.

The ground was clear and level, not far from the lake, and upon the edge of the rim of aspen trees which skirted the shore on that side.

He walked around the spot studying the location and character of the ground; then went and

got the tape-line and measured it for the position and dimensions.

"It will have to be at least sixteen feet wide by forty feet long," he said.

Then he went over to where the trees grew the thickest, and of largest size, and made a rough estimate of how many would be required for the structure.

"I think we will use the aspens," he said. "They are more convenient, and a trifle larger than the pines, besides being the easier wood to handle and shape."

Then he took an ax from the camp and went vigorously to work, chopping down the largest and straightest ones.

"If the boys are away no longer than three days, I won't exactly have a finished house for them when they get back,— not by a long way, — but I can get things started so that it won't take very long for all hands together to finish it up," he thought.

He worked with a will; so that before noon he had a large number of the straight trunks stripped of their limbs, and cut off at the desired lengths.

"I 'll get a bite of something to eat, and after lunch I 'll see what Teddy and Pete are good for at hauling," he said. "I imagine Sancho would

have the most sense, but it won't do to work him for a few days yet."

Dave's lunch was very simple, and quickly over, and he then went out into the bushes and caught the two donkeys and led them to camp.

He put on their pack-saddles and roped and "cinched" them carefully.

His first thought had been that it would be possible to work the animals double, and thus make them haul a fairly heavy load; but after hitching them together in every manner he could think of, he found it impossible to make them pull in such a way as to accomplish anything, so that he fell to using one donkey at a time; fastening the smaller end of the log by a rope to the pack-saddle, and urging the burro to drag it, by easy stages. It required a little time and patience to break the little fellows in to this kind of work,—which they must have thought altogether nonsensical,—and a quick-tempered man would have had but poor success in getting them to do it at all.

But, by changing donkeys every little while, and taking one log at a time, he made such progress that in two hours he had his entire cut hauled to the site of the cabin.

"Well, I've solved the problem, anyhow," he said. "Now, it's simply a question of keep-

ing the good work booming along, and time will do the rest."

He turned the burros loose, and again went to chopping, and by night had felled and trimmed what he believed would be enough to complete the house.

"I 'll get them all hauled by noon to-morrow, and then I 'll be ready to go to notching and putting together," he said.

Throughout the whole day he had been so interested in his task, that, what with planning and talking to the burros, he had escaped all sense of loneliness.

But after he had eaten supper and put the camp to rights, he sat down in his usual resting-place, between the tent and the fire, and very quickly the sense of being all alone crept over him.

"If I had even a little dog it would be a help," he muttered to himself, as he glanced across at the solid wall of black beyond the reach of his fire-glow.

"I wonder how the boys have been getting along. If they 've been able to do all that Neal anticipated, they must be in Gunnison by this time, and will be starting back day after to-morrow morning. I 'm not going to look for them, very much, because I don't believe it 's possible for them to get through in so short time.

"Still, they 'll find me ready to welcome them if they do drop in. I don't think I 'd make a very good hermit. Well, I suppose the best way to dispose of this sort of thing is to go to sleep."

He sat a little while longer, trying to turn his thoughts to the work of the next morning, and was, at length, upon the point of rising to fix his fire for the night, when there came up to his ears, from the valley beneath, a long, dismal howl, indescribably fierce and terrifying.

This was followed by another, and presently there was a continued chorus of the same sounds.

"Ugh! It 's like the laughing of a band of maniacs," and he shivered slightly. "I don't know of any sound that seems so relentless and cruel as the blood-cry of a pack of wolves after a deer. It must be a black-tail, and I 'm afraid they 're pretty sure to get him. They seem to be going down the cañon, and the farther away they get, the better it will suit me.

"Well, there have been no signs of any of those fellows up here on the shelf, and I feel rather glad of it to-night."

He now proceeded to roll his logs together for the all-night fire, and in a few minutes more he was lying comfortably between the blankets.

"THERE CAME UP FROM THE VALLEY BENEATH A LONG, DISMAL HOWL."

Youth, health, and a hard day's work combined make an excellent soporific, so that Dave was almost instantly in the land where loneliness is unknown.

How long he had slept he could not tell, when something seemed suddenly to bounce into his unshorn and rather thick hair, and after scratching vigorously at his head for an instant, was gone.

This, of course, caused him to spring bolt upright, although quite dazed, and not at all knowing just what had awakened him.

The fire-light was shining into the tent, but he could see nothing, and his sleepiness was so great that he muttered, "I must have dreamed," and settled himself back to sleep.

He again had gotten well into dreamland when the same thing recurred, but with such an air of playful mischief that, catching the faint sound of something scurrying away, Dave—now more thoroughly awake than before, and at first quite startled—was for a moment angry, and then burst into a hearty laugh.

"It 's a mountain rat," he exclaimed. "I thought the wolves had got me. I s'pose the villain is lonesome, and thought that was the best way to attract my notice."

In a minute more there came such a rattling of

tin dishes and spoons as would seem to have required the efforts of half a dozen cooks. Then came a slight pause, after which the sound was resumed with variations.

Dave was lying down now; but, although thoroughly awake, he made no motion toward getting up.

"Bang away, old man!" he said. "It won't do me any good to chase you off, for you'll come back again. I 'm really not very sorry to have you around, either. Seems kind of sociable. If only you don't carry off all our spoons and knives before morning, there won't be any war between us."

He lay listening for a little while longer, then fell asleep, and this time he was not awakened until daybreak.

Before the forenoon was half gone, Dave had his logs all upon the ground.

Then he laid out his foundation by digging a slight trench all around, in which to lay his bottom logs.

After first putting notches in them near the ends, he rolled them into the trench and fitted them tightly together. This done, he took the ax and hewed them slightly flat all around upon the upper side, and the first course was completed.

This was a good start, and thereafter the work progressed so well that when night came he had rolled the last of his logs into place.

"There!" he said, as he walked around and surveyed his work.

"I 've got a solid five-foot wall all around, anyhow. I 've made a bad miscalculation, though, on the number of logs it needs, for I 'm not anywhere near through. I feel pretty sure Neal won't be able to find any fault with the job, thus far; but I 'm climbing up toward where I 'm likely to get into trouble.

"I believe I 'll leave the work right where it is, and let Neal superintend the topping out, and fixing of the peak and roof. I 'm in doubt about it, and he 's familiar with the whole thing. The boys may, possibly, be here to-morrow night; and whether they are or not, I 'll be able to find a job to fill in my time with for a day or two."

Dave's new friend, the rat, made its appearance earlier that evening.

Dave was at the table eating supper, and it was yet light, when a little ashen-gray animal leaped upon a box at a little distance from him, and sat upright, blinking at him with its beady eyes.

It had a tail which curved over its back somewhat like a squirrel's, and was decidedly bushy,

but the hairs were sparse and thin. In other respects it was a rat in appearance, and was in fact the "pack-rat" (*Neotoma cinerea*) of the Rocky Mountains.

It is called the "pack-rat" because of its disposition to carry away all sorts of articles and utensils of which it cannot possibly make any use, and in this respect, as well as in its curiosity and traits of pure mischief, is radically different from all its brothers and cousins.

As Dave remained quiet, the animal began hopping about, and in doing so struck together a tin cup and plate which were lying upon the box.

The rat bent its head and looked at them curiously, then with his foot struck the cup so that it again rang against the plate.

Then it stooped, and seizing the plate in both its paws, raised it slightly above the cup and let it drop. Sitting back erect, it cocked its head to one side and listened to its ring, with either a critical or pleased ear. Evidently, though, it was the latter, for it repeated the operation again and again.

This practice so amused Dave, that he burst into a laugh, whereupon it darted into the bushes like a flash.

"I 've heard of the rat doing that very thing, but I did n't believe it," he said. "I knew

about lots of their other tricks, though. I guess I 'll put the lighter utensils underneath the heavier ones to-night. He 's pleasant company, but we need our forks and cups."

Once, in the night, Dave was dimly conscious of a hairy something brushing past his face; but he only smiled, and sank back to sleep again.

CHAPTER XIV.

HUNTING THE BIG-HORN.

Perhaps it was because he had no weighty duty upon his mind, that Dave slept later than usual the next morning.

The sun was up, and its rays had begun to stream into the tent when he opened his eyes. He sprang up quickly, saying, "It won't do to grow lazy just because the boys are away!"

He prepared his breakfast, and had finished eating before he decided how he would put in the day.

After leaving the table, he took a pail and went to the lake for water. Reaching the smooth flat rock upon which he was accustomed to stand and dip in his pail, his eye was arrested by the clean-cut and perfect reflection of the overhanging mountain within its glassy depths. Every detail of rock and fissure and shrub seemed to be portrayed.

While he stood admiring the beautiful scene, something in the reflection seemed to stir, as if detached from the face of the cliff.

Turning his eyes upward, he perceived a band of about half a dozen big-horns, on a ledge of rock high above, and seemingly overhanging the lake. Instantly Dave's mind was made up as to what he would do.

"I call this too fine an opportunity for mutton. to be thrown away!" he exclaimed. "They are on the west side of the waterfall, though, and if I get a good shot, I will have to take our visitor's trail and go around to the other side."

He returned with the water, took his rifle and carefully examined it to see whether the magazine were filled, and returned to the shore.

Following the beach around to the outlet, and thence down stream through the woods to the dead-tree bridge, he crossed over, and made his way toward the rocky ridge Neal had described.

Before he had covered the entire distance, he saw that he was likely to be thrown entirely out of range. It was too nearly underneath the band of sheep; and, moreover, there appeared to be a jutting crag of the mountain, heretofore unobserved, which would quite obscure them from this direction.

He concluded to advance, though, until he could learn the exact conditions of the mountain side, inasmuch as there appeared to be small

hope of getting within shooting-distance from any other point.

Arriving at the extreme corner of the plateau, he paused upon the brink of the almost sheer descent, and where the upper half of the mountain rose above him, smiling at the effectiveness of Neal's work.

"There is n't much chance now of any one's getting up here from below," he said. "Neal has smoothed the wall down as though it were chiseled."

He stood for a few moments, looking far below into the basin, from which the mists of the morning were not wholly gone. Then he glanced along the great wall, northward, to where the range was notched into more separate and individual mountains.

"Our sick man must have gone in the direction of Castle Peak," was his thought. "As far as I am able to follow the line of his trail, it keeps pretty well up, instead of dropping into the basin."

Then he turned about, and following along the cliff, climbed over the rocky ridge and stood at the edge of the lake. Moving backward a short distance from the cliff, he scanned that portion of the side which was adjacent to him.

"There seems to be a ledge that starts from

this spur and inclines upward toward the left," he cogitated. "There 's a chance that it may take me up to a point where I can get a good shot, and I 'll try it."

He started, and worked his way along the narrow bench with but little difficulty. It slanted decidedly upward, and after proceeding for some distance, he glanced below and saw that he was directly above the lake.

"What a plunge-bath a fellow could get from here," he said.

Working his way still along and upward, he came, in a short time to a vertical dyke that completely barred his way.

"This is a huge disappointment! I wonder if there 's no other way out?" he said aloud. "There 's no way above, but if I could manage to creep down to that ledge below me, it looks as though it would carry me along upward in the same course as this one."

He retraced his steps for some distance, but could find no place where it seemed possible to descend.

"If I had a rope, I might do it," he thought. Then, "I 'll go and get one!" he cried. "If the sheep will only stay where they are for a while, I may give them a stirring up yet."

He laid his rifle carefully down, so that he

could move more quickly, and scrambled back over the way he had come. Reaching the ridge, he leaped lightly down and ran rapidly around toward the camp.

After crossing the stream and gaining the shore again, he paused to see if the sheep were still in sight, and saw that they were somewhat lower down than before, but farther over toward the left.

"That 's all the better for me," he said; and ran onward to the camp. Quickly selecting a stout rope and also a leather sling for his rifle, he returned as rapidly as he could.

This, of course, consumed some little time, but Dave felt no great fear that the animals would depart, unless, of course, they should take alarm at his nearer approach.

When he arrived at the ledge, he searched all along until he found a crevice into which he could slip his rope. Then knotting the end securely around a stout stick he had picked up,— to serve as an anchor,— he adjusted and then tested it.

The next thing was to take his rifle, and, using the strap he had brought to sling it to his back, he seized the rope and swung himself over the edge.

The distance was about twenty or twenty-five feet, and as he could steady himself with his

toes against the wall, he slid down with the greatest ease.

"That was simple," he said. "I can go up almost as easily when I come back."

Leaving the rope, he began to work his way along, keeping the mountain on his right, as before.

After he had advanced for upwards of a hundred feet, he looked back, and saw that he had risen to a higher point than the spot where he left the other ledge. Then glancing above, he said:

"This is where we can see the metamorphic rocks and the stratification that Neal tells about. Up there, at just about the same corresponding distance above this bench I am standing on, is the same ledge I started along in the first place.

"It 's clear that they 're both seams of shale lying parallel to each other, and were formed, one above the other, by gradual deposit at the bottom of some great lake or stream. The change — or metamorphosis — came about long afterwards, through enormous pressure or heat. Coming in so near together as they do, this ought — according to Neal's theory — to be a place to look for good results in a quartz vein, if one could be found."

Of course, these soliloquies of Dave's were not

all aloud; and, just now, he was proceeding with caution, on account of the big-horns.

For some time he was unable to see them at all; but after he had clambered along and upward until he seemed at a great height above the lake, he heard the rattling sound of a falling stone, and peering cautiously upward, he saw the band in plain view.

Then he pressed himself as close to the wall as he could, and removed his hat, so as not to attract attention.

He could now have shot one with ease; but he concluded that only the largest — a ram — would satisfy his ambition; so he quietly waited.

Dave could not be called a natural sportsman, except in a comparative sense. He loved the adventure and excitement of the chase; and, being naturally persistent, he dearly loved to succeed in whatever he undertook, but he cared little about killing game for its own sake.

As he crouched against the wall now, he thought:

"It 's almost too bad to shoot such noble fellows as they. I believe I admire them more than any wild animal I have ever seen."

And their appearance was indeed, in all respects, noble.

There is, to begin with, something poetic —

almost heroic — about the manner of life, and the haunts, of the mountain sheep.

Keeping within the high altitudes and almost inaccessible parts of the rugged mountains, he is fairly able to defy any creature — including man — which would be his natural enemy.

His feeding and resting places seem, from innate choice, to be the sunny sides of steep declivities, where there are occasional narrow ledges or shelves, which, for any other four-footed beast, would be utterly out of reach.

This security is, in fact, largely true against man himself; as the *Ovis Montana* is able to traverse, with perfect safety and speed, heights so dizzy and rocky fronts so bold as to make brave men shrink, and cause them to regard him with admiring wonder.

Dave could see the herd in fullest detail from the spot where he lay hidden.

Their strong, symmetrical legs, and the waving flow of the tense but obedient muscles; the proud, finely proportioned necks; the spiral, sweeping curves of the great horns; and, above all, the matchless, independent grace of their whole poise upon the narrow, jutting surface of the rocks,— all, taken together, made a picture which Dave could have spent hours in watching.

"I 've always said they 're the finest animals

that walk," he whispered. "I believe I never can enjoy killing another one; and I 'm almost sorry I came out."

Just then, however, there seemed to be a general movement of the herd. There was no appearance of an alarm, but rather, as though by unanimous consent, they thought it well to go elsewhere.

Dave brought his rifle to his shoulder; but before he fired he had plenty of time to admire the masterful ease and self-possession with which each quick, upward bound was made. There was never a slip nor a scramble. The uplifting and the fall of every foot was absolutely sure, and was grace itself.

"If I wait any longer I shall lose my beauty," he thought. "Forgive me, old fellow; I 'm actually sorry."

The noble ram had paused after a magnificent jump; and, with arched neck and sidelong bend of the head, was looking down toward the plateau and the lake.

Taking a quick aim at about an inch behind the shoulder, Dave's rifle cracked, and the sheep came rolling and tumbling down, while in panic-stricken terror the rest of the band swiftly fled.

He was not instantly killed, and even as he fell his sharp, spreading hoofs and the rubbery,

"Dave could see the herd in fullest detail"

cushion-like posteriors of his feet would grip the rocks, where he would hold for an instant and then slip below. This broke the force of his fall, so that when he reached the shelf upon which Dave stood, at a point some distance above him, he lay quite motionless.

Fearing he might fall or throw himself farther down, Dave made his way to him as quickly as possible. But he was quite dead.

As the hunter-craving had been entirely appeased in Dave, and there being no occasion for great haste, he seated himself by the side of the body and examined it carefully.

He had killed sheep before, but somehow had never felt such keen admiration for them as to-day.

As he stroked the neck, the limbs, and horns, and thought how full of brave life and strength he had been but a few minutes before, there was far more of regret than of the hunter's exultation in his mind.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PLUNGE-BATH — THE CAVERN.

Dave sat for some time looking out over the expanse of diversified scenery before he became fully roused to a sense of its perfection. But at length his musings turned into a different channel, and he exclaimed with a good deal of energy and enthusiasm:

"Well, I had n't thought of it before, but it 's worth risking a fellow's neck to come up here just for the view. I 've never realized the high-class beauty of our platform camping-ground as fully as I do this minute. The foreground contrast is what makes the whole thing especially perfect."

It was indeed a beautiful scene before him.

At some little distance to his right, coming from an unknown height above, and falling prone into the lake beneath him, was the waterfall, the sound of whose roar and dash came up as pleasantly to his ears as that of a deep-toned organ.

The quiet water flashed upward to him reflec-

tions of the tense deep blue of the sky, the vapory white clouds, and the umber and gray tones of the overhanging cliff.

The green setting of trees and shrubbery round about the lake, the entire shape and detail of the secluded and lovely plateau, and the distinctness with which everything contained upon it could be viewed, the vanishing outlet of the lake, the tents, the partly built cabin, even the three contented-looking donkeys, were all directly before him.

On his other hand, and curving away into the distance, was the arc of the great mountain wall, while the entire background, front, left, and right, was formed by the massive and variegated peaks of the range which hemmed him in.

"To me, it seems like a liberal education only to live in a place like this," he murmured. "To sit here and absorb this scene ought to be enough to make even the cheapest kind of a man feel poetic.

"If I had the voice, I believe I would n't lack inspiration to sing heroic hymns — something that would be a combination of the triumphant and the solemn, and would at the same time express gladness for the gift of eyesight. It 's more than exhilarating; it 's fairly uplifting."

He sat for a long time musing after this fash-

ion. How long it was he did not know, for he became quite lost in his thoughts and in the scene before him; and besides, he had no watch with him.

But finally his mind returned to himself and his position, and to the dead ram beside him.

Looking his prize all over, he cogitated:

"I wonder how I 'm going to get him home. I 'd like to take nearly everything — or, at least, the head, horns, and hide, besides the meat; but he must weigh more than two hundred pounds as he is now.

"The first thing will be to skin and dress him, and get the mutton to camp. That 's simple necessity, and will take two trips. The rest of him — head, skin, and so forth — I suppose I 'll have to regard as luxuries, and make them wait and take their chance."

Dave then drew his hunting-knife from his pocket and opened it, and went vigorously to work.

When he had removed the hide and properly divided the carcass, he took one half of the mutton upon his shoulder, and made his way carefully down the ledge to where his rope was hanging.

Leaving the meat there, he made a second trip for the other half, and afterwards went a third time to get his gun and the hide.

This much accomplished, he fastened half of the sheep to the hanging rope, and climbed hand-over-hand to the upper ledge, where, after removing his gun, he hauled up the piece of meat.

Then he carried this portion and his gun down the ledge to the rock ridge, where he left them, and returned to the rope.

He slid down the rope again, fastened it to the other half of the sheep, then climbed up and repeated the process.

"There!" he exclaimed. "I 've got all my necessaries of life here on horizontal ground. Duty first, and recreation afterwards! I believe there 's time enough, and I don't see why I should n't go back and get my luxuries. That head with the horns is the finest one I ever saw, and I would like to preserve it."

To suggest was to act, and it was not very long before he was again picking his way downward along the ledge, with the head and great horns upon his shoulder.

The load he carried this time was not only extremely heavy, but of large bulk and very unwieldy, and Dave found much difficulty in keeping it balanced, and in maintaining his own equilibrium along the giddy pathway.

He had accomplished the larger part of the

distance, and was beginning to feel acutely the strain upon his muscles, when the horns of his top-heavy pack struck against a projecting rock and swayed heavily. He put up his left hand to save it, reeled, his foot stumbled over an obstacle, and he knew himself to be falling.

Quickly he threw off his unmanageable burden, and grasped wildly at the fragment of ledge that was nearest within reach, missed it, and went sliding down the almost precipitous surface toward the shining water below.

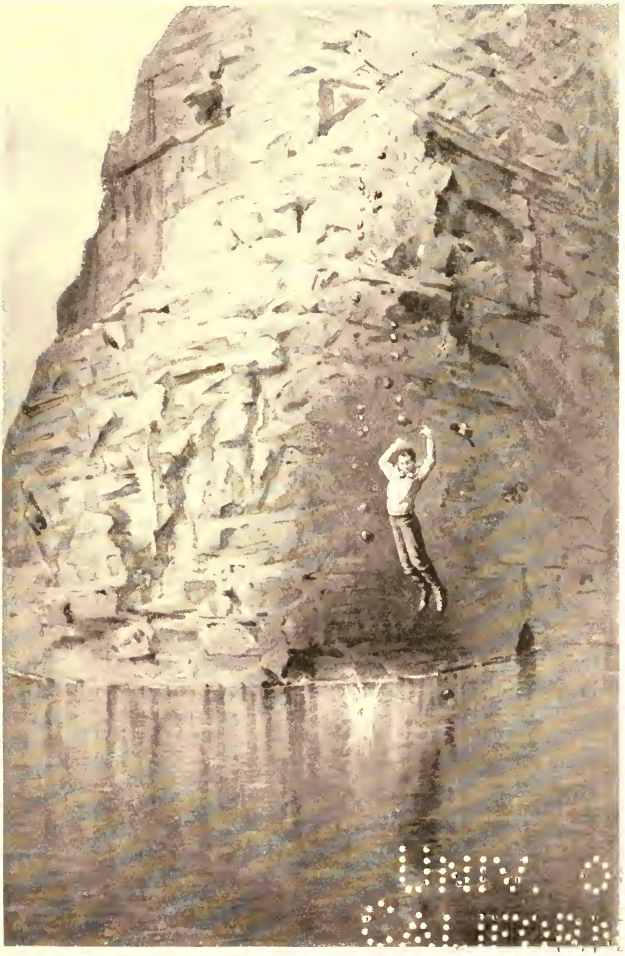
Dave's courage and methodical clear-headedness never left him for an instant.

"I 'm going to get my plunge-bath, after all," he thought, and almost smiled at the ludicrous appearance he must present.

"There 's nobody around to laugh at me, anyhow, and if I strike nothing more than *water*, I don't think it 'll be awful."

These thoughts flashed quickly through his mind as he slid down toward the unknown depth.

The height above the water of the spot from which he fell was something like sixty feet, and although the larger part of the distance was rather more of a slide than a fall, still the face of the rock was so nearly vertical and so smooth, that he shot downward like a flash.



"He shot downward like a flash."

At a height of about twenty feet above the water, the inclined plane fell away into a sheer drop, so that Dave flew out into the air, and thence striking the water feet foremost, he disappeared and went far down beneath the surface.

He kept his legs pressed together, and raised both arms high above his head, so that he was not injured, but as he rose to the surface he spluttered:

"Ugh! Goodness gracious! I never went into anything colder than this,— even when I 've had my skates on!"

Looking about him as he swam, he was at first quite filled with confusion as to his whereabouts.

"I 'd like to know where I am," he thought. "I can see the farther side of the lake, a long way over, but I can't see anything else except this rock."

Turning about in the water, he very soon realized that he had fallen into a small rock-encircled cove, whose only outlook was directly toward the remote side of the lake.

To get his bearings, and learn just how far it would be necessary to swim in order to save himself, he would first be obliged to go outside of the inclosing walls.

The uncertainty about this, as against a place of temporary security, which he could see close at hand, decided him; and he made for a cavity at the foot of the wall, which showed a floor or base of solid character.

Securing his hat, which floated quite near by, a few strokes carried him to what he sought, and raising his head and shoulders from the water, he looked into a spacious cavern.

He was so chilled by the ice-cold water that he did not hesitate an instant, but quickly drew himself within, stood erect, and then shook himself, as a dog would do, to get partially freed from the weight of water in his garments.

"Perhaps this could n't be called being 'well off,' but it 's better than freezing and drowning all in one act, anyway. I 'll wait here till I get my breath; then I can take off my boots and the heaviest part of my clothes before I swim out on any exploring expedition.

"Jiminy! Whiz! Who would have thought the water was as cold as it is? It seemed to me when I first went down below that I would be turned into a solid marble statue before I could get back on top again. Whew! I wish I had a little sunshine!

"Now, what sort of a place is this I 've been dropped into?"

CHAPTER XVI.

A CAVE OF WONDERS.

Dave began to look about him curiously.

The only apparent opening was the one at which he had entered. After his eyes had become accustomed to the change from the brilliant sunshine outside to the comparative dimness within, it seemed to him that the space near the entrance was really quite light; but he reasoned that it must be because of the refracted rays of light through the wonderfully clear and glassy water.

Where he was standing the ceiling was scarcely more than a foot above his head; but as the apartment seemed to expand somewhat farther back, he took a half-dozen steps, then stopped and faced about toward the entrance.

The shape and width of the remarkable apartment seemed to be rather curiously regular; for, with the exception of the narrowing-up at the mouth, there were apparently up-and-down walls which did not recede to greater width apart than eight or ten feet.

"I don't understand this thing at all, but I guess there must be an explanation somewhere, if I look far enough.

"I 'm going a little farther back to see how it looks," he said. "Seems almost as though somebody had been running a tunnel in here on a vein. If he has, though, he knows how to do nice work. He has n't broken up his walls at all. Neal and I can't keep the dynamite from splintering ours up so badly that we have to timber them to prevent their caving in."

He went a dozen or more steps farther back, when he found that there was a cross-chamber, or gallery, into which he could penetrate no great distance on either side on account of the darkness.

So he continued his course somewhat farther straight away from the entrance, and after turning at length and facing about,— because it was impossible to distinguish anything except when looking toward the light,— he was interested to see that the gallery was less regular, or at least, was more broken by crossings or side-passages.

"There 's something very odd about this," he thought.

"It don't look like the work of men, and it don't look natural, either."

He moved toward the entrance again; and when he reached the place of the first cross-gallery something at his feet caught his eye, and he stooped down to see what it was that gave out the dull, fiery glow. It was flat and irregular in shape, metallic in feeling, and as he raised it it seemed unusually heavy.

He carried it down to the better light near the opening, and examined it closely. Then he gave an exclamation of astonishment at its appearance, took out his knife and scratched it, and shouted:

"I 've struck Aladdin's Cave this time! It 's a nugget! Solid gold!"

The piece, in length and breadth, was not unlike the shape of a man's hand, and must have weighed fully twenty-five ounces.

After testing its weight, first in one hand, then in the other, Dave sang out, aloud:

"It 's worth four to five hundred dollars! I don't feel half so cold as I did, and I 'm going to see if I can't find some more."

Dave's voice sounded strange, and there was a hollow, cavernous roar after it, but the strangeness was almost entirely lost upon the boy, over whom had suddenly surged a premonitory wave of the malady known as "gold fever."

He walked slowly over the ground again; this

time examining the floor, walls, and ceiling more carefully than at first. It did not take him very long to come to a definite conclusion as to what it all meant.

The floor or bottom of the cavern was wholly covered with small fragments of decomposed quartz and spar, and portions of similar matter adhered to the side-walls. Overhead, wherever he could touch and examine closely, it was entirely made up of vein-stuff.

Reaching the spot where he had found the nugget, he dropped upon his knees and began poking in the rubbish. In a few minutes he found a piece about half the size of the former one, partly imbedded in spar of the same formation. A little farther search brought to light several other nuggets, all smaller than the first, whose combined weight Dave thought must be at least fifty ounces.

Then he arose and examined the character of the intersecting or cross-passage, and found it to be very much like that of the main gallery.

"It 's plain enough now," he said. "This is no work of man. Nature has done it all. This place is a complete proof of Neal's idea of vein-stuffs and the leaching process of gold-gathering.

"Leaving the business part of my morning's work, and turning back after the sheep's head,

has also proved the truth of the old saying, that 'one luxury or extravagance always leads to another.' This case, though, works out a little different from what is intended in the maxim, don't it?

"I've stumbled upon one of the rarest combinations known to geological science. It's a vein that is crossed and divided by several others. All of them being nearly vertical, they have cut through numerous layers of stratified rock, and been given a beautiful chance for leaching.

"Gold has been gathered into large nuggets, and, down here at this depth, through some strange chemistry of air and water, the vein-stuff has been entirely decomposed, and let part of the gold loose and lying in the rubbish. There's a fortune right here, and I guess it's going to be a mighty easy thing to get it, too.

"But, goodness, gracious! It's beautiful and wonderful, and all that, but it won't dry my clothes, nor feed me. I've got to get away from here in double-quick time."

He hurried to the entrance, quickly removed his boots and coat, and laid them with his little pile of nuggets. He took only one broad, flat piece, which did not weigh more than two ounces, and put it in his pocket.

Then he slipped through the opening into

the chilly water, and swam as rapidly as he could.

"I 'll be all right if I don't cramp," he thought.

When he emerged from the little cove into the open lake, and looked around, he saw that he was not more than four or five hundred feet from the ridge where he left his mutton, so he struck out boldly.

Although it was not a long swim, the coldness of the water, together with the rather rough experience Dave had been having, would have been a severe strain upon the endurance of a weaker boy than he. He was a fine swimmer, though; and not merely this, but was in perfect health, and his nerves were as firm as a rock; so that nothing of the sort would give him the least fear, and thus weaken his powers.

One of the worst features of the swim was the difficulty of breathing in such icy water; but he finally managed to drag himself, nearly spent, ashore.

"Whew!" he gasped. "But that 's an experience. I 'm glad I did n 't have to swim a mile. That sort of thing would be great practice for a fellow who was going on a north pole expedition. Seems as if I 'd been in another world and got back to earth — or at least I 'll

feel so as soon as I can get a change of clothes and something hot to eat and drink. Now, for camp."

He climbed the ridge, shouldered one of the halves of mutton, picked up his rifle, and started for camp as rapidly as he was able to get along over the rocks in his stockinged feet.

When he at length reached there, and looked at the watch hanging in the tent, he was surprised to see that it was not quite noon.

"I 've had a good deal of life crowded into small space this morning," he said; and then went about changing his clothing.

This done, he lighted a fire and started his dinner to cooking.

"I 'll have to put in the whole afternoon in the kitchen," he thought. "I don't believe the boys will get here to-night; but if they do, they 'll be mighty hungry, and I 'll have to give 'em as good a spread as the camp affords."

He was so busy throughout the afternoon, and so occupied with pleasant thoughts, that he was fairly startled, just at the approach of dusk, by a shrill whistle.

He looked around quickly, then said: "Why, it 's Neal!" and gave a cheery answer of the same kind.

In a few minutes there came the tramp of feet,

and as the returning party came into sight through the bushes, Neal's hearty voice rang out:

"Davey, boy, seeing ye is better than supper and a good, soft seat! I 've thought of heaps of trouble and a hundred scrapes you 'd be getting into."

"You may be sure I 'm glad to see you, too!" cried Dave, as he shook hands with all around.

"If I 'd had time enough on my hands to think about it, I 'd have been lonesome enough to scream; but, you see, I planned my business matters so that I 've been able to fight off the hysterics.— I 've had the 'scrapes,' too; but I don't look any the worse for them, do I?— but, how did you get along?— never mind now, though. You 're tired and hungry. Sit down, boys! Sit down and rest, and dinner will be ready in five minutes. We can have our 'heap big talk' then."

"We won't make you wait for the important part, Dave. We got our filings in ahead, and everything is all right. We 've got a great story for you, though," said Ken.

"Good enough! Hurrah! I want to know everything about it!" cried Dave.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE VICTORS' RETURN.

Dinner was on time, according to Dave's agreement; and during the meal a full account of the events of the trip was given.

The talking was chiefly conducted by Phil and Ken; Phil relating his adventure in getting lost, and Ken giving an account of the scene in the register's office.

When they had finished, Dave remarked:

"Considering the sort of crowd it is, I would think we may look for another visit. Don't you think so, Neal?"

"There 's no telling what men of their sort may try to do, especially after a long drunk. They have n't any sense — to speak of — Brodie knows more than all the rest together, — and their one idea now would be 'revenge.' They might have some sort of a drunken notion, too, that if they can surprise us and get possession, they 'd be able to scare us into transferring a large part of the property to 'em. But, there ain't anything to be afraid of. The gang is

without either courage or brains. All we need do is to be on the lookout for surprises."

"There 's something else I think we may have to do, boys," returned Dave. "I 've made an important discovery while you were away."

Then he related his sheep-hunting adventure, with a detailed account of its thrilling and strange conclusion.

When he had finished, Phil began to laugh, and said:

"Say, Dave, . . . Excuse me for laughing. You know I would n 't think you 'd *invent* a story . . . But did you have this dream in the night, or in the daytime."

"All right, Phil. If I were in your place and you in mine, I presume I would ask the same question," replied Dave. But, you see, I thought about that very thing, so I had just sense enough to bring away a little *proof*."

He ran into the tent, and extracting the nugget from the pocket of the trousers he had removed, quickly brought it forth and placed it in Phil's hand.

"That 's one of the smallest," he said, smiling. "Now, if you 'll say you 're real sorry, I 'll take you over to where the rest are, to-morrow."

Exclamations of wonder and admiration burst from all the party.

"O, say, Dave! Don't leave me out! I won't do it again," cried Phil.

"All right, Phil. I accept the apology," said Dave, laughingly. "I had to make you do it for the sake of dignity and appearances. Between you and me, if I had n't kept my head well enough to bring away this piece, I might think of it now as only a dream, too."

"There's no dream about this little chunk, Dave," said Neal. "It 's worth a good forty dollars. I s'pose you did n 't notice whether the vein was well defined at the surface; that is, right up through the mountain?"

"I never saw it at all," replied Dave. "I was only thinking about the sheep. I know now, though, that it can be seen plainly enough. But, say, boys! What are we going to do about it?

"I feel sure that it 's richer than the 'Telluride.' I believe there are easy fortunes in it for us all. But it 's outside of the property we claim; the ground is n't ours; Neal and Ken have already filed claims, and Phil and I are not of age."

Ken and Phil began to look quite serious, and both looked at Neal as though the best hope for an answer to the difficulty lay in him.

Neal stared hard into his cup for a few minutes, before he said,

"That *is* a puzzler, Dave, sure enough. We might, of course, go ahead and work out all the loose gold, as though 't was 'placer' ground, and keep the thing quiet. . . . The local rules of most all districts hold that up as the right of the fellow who discovers a property. . . .

"But it ain't safe, because you 're liable to have it legally taken away from you by any mean duffer who 's willing to make trouble for you;—and besides, you 're really stealing Uncle Sam's property until you take steps to show you 're ready to buy and pay for it. Most men seem to think there ain't any moral question in it at all,—that it's just a legal one, or else one of *force;* but I've never been able to quite see it that way."

"That 's right, Neal!" exclaimed Ken. "I like that kind of talk. The business world is too full of the other idea — that anything you can get hold of, and are strong enough, or smart enough to keep, is your property. That sort of belief won't do for the man whose honesty is of the right kind. If there's a fortune in this new discovery of Dave's, we must try and get it. There must be some just and honorable way of doing so, under the law. But if there

is n't, then I think we would better let somebody else have it."

"Is n't there a way it can be done, Neal?" asked Phil, with the keenest distress in his voice.

"O yes. We *must* find a way. I 've got an idea in my head, boys, that I think I can work out by morning. Let 's sleep on it. To-morrow morning we 'll go over and see Dave's 'dream,' and by that time I reckon we 'll have some way figured out that 'll be all satisfactory.

"But look here, Dave. You better invent some way to put us into your magic cave dry-shod. Maybe the rest of us ain't as fond of doing the 'muskrat' way of diving into holes as you are. I never *did* like cold water very well myself."

Dave laughed, and said gaily:

"I 've got that fixed already. I 'll show you the scheme in the morning."

Dave then began to speak of his other experiences at camp alone, — the dreadful loneliness of the evenings, the howling of the wolves, and the real pleasure he found in the society of the rat.

His account of that curious animal interested Phil greatly.

"I hope he will stay around here," Phil said. "I 'd like to get acquainted with him."

"O, he 'll never leave us now," said Neal. "You 'll be on intimate terms with him in a few days. If he don't bring his wife and children, and all his sisters and brothers and cousins, to live with us, maybe we 'll be able to get along with him fairly well."

"I 'm feeling very friendly myself," said Dave. "I don't believe he 's a bad fellow at all."

Then the talk drifted away to the pack-train which was to be expected within two or three days, and from that to the new cabin which ought to be ready to receive the stores when they arrived.

"Dave meanwhile said nothing about what he had accomplished in the building line.

For one thing, he was not altogether sure that Neal would approve of the quality of all his work; so he chose to remain quiet and let Neal discover it for himself.

And so bedtime came, and with it sound, refreshing sleep for all the boys.

CHAPTER XVIII.

VOYAGE OF EXPLORATION.—NEAL'S PLAN.

Neal was the first one awake and out in the morning, and after he had gotten the fire started and breakfast well under way, he called the boys with a shout.

"Ken! Phil!" he cried. "Come and see what a trick the rascal Dave has played on us! Why, he 's got the cabin half finished, and it 's a big one too!"

The boys never needed a second invitation to rise, and were speedily outside, each doing his part in the work of the camp.

They all were enthusiastic in their praises of the work Dave had accomplished, but he himself made light of it, saying:

"The logs are very small, you see. In fact, they seem more like poles than logs, and it was n't very much of a trick to get them here and put them together."

"All the same, the 'poles' are big enough to make mighty heavy lifting," responded Neal.

"You 've got a house well started, and I don't see how you managed to get so far along with it."

Dave was secretly quite delighted with Neal's approval, but he only said:

"O, the burros are unusually good workers."

At breakfast Neal said:

"The first real work we go about ought to be the finishing of Dave's house; but, of course, we 've got to see this 'fairy grotto' the boy has found, first of all. How are you going to get us there, Dave?"

"O, that 's easy!" replied Dave. "We 'll just go down to the lake and cut a few dead aspen trees, lash them together, and we 'll have a raft that will float us all. Then we can pole — or paddle — it right over to the mouth of the cave. By working together we ought to make it all complete in half an hour."

"Well, I 'm ready now," said Neal, rising from the table. We can let the kitchen take care of itself for once. We have more important things on hand."

So all hands proceeded to the lake shore, and in a little while had completed a raft large enough to comfortably float the entire party. Three layers of small logs were used, by crossing them, and then lashing together with ropes.

"We 'll have some nails when the pack-train

gets here," said Neal. "A few of them would come in handy here, but a man never knows how many things he can get along without until he tries.

"Are we all ready?"

"Let me go to the camp after a candle and a pick," said Dave.

He returned quickly, and said:

"Now, then! I 'm all ready, if the rest of you are."

"You 're the pilot of the ship," said Neal. "Give us the course, and we 'll do the propelling."

"I think we all can get a chance to work," replied Dave. "We will make for the cliff. I can't see the point from here, but I can find it when I get over there."

For the greater part of the distance the water was too deep to admit of poling, so all worked hard at paddling with their poles. This was slow and laborious work; but the cliff was reached at length, and, by paddling slowly along, Dave was able soon to point out the narrow cove, and at its end, at the water level, a small dark space, which he said was the entrance.

It all became clear as they approached, and as Dave brought a corner of the raft up so that it reached the low arch of the entrance, they

found it would be difficult for all to creep within, and remain perfectly dry.

"We must be careful to anchor our ship safely," Neal said. "It would be a bad predicament to have it go adrift."

"All right, Neal; you take the painter and go inside. We will keep her steady till you get the cable made fast," said Dave.

Seeing that the raft could be steadied better from a foothold upon the ground, Dave did not hesitate, but dropped into the water, waist deep, and stood upon a slight projecting ledge while he held the raft steady for the others.

Neal then crawled within, and taking the end of his rope, made it fast around a pointed rock inside.

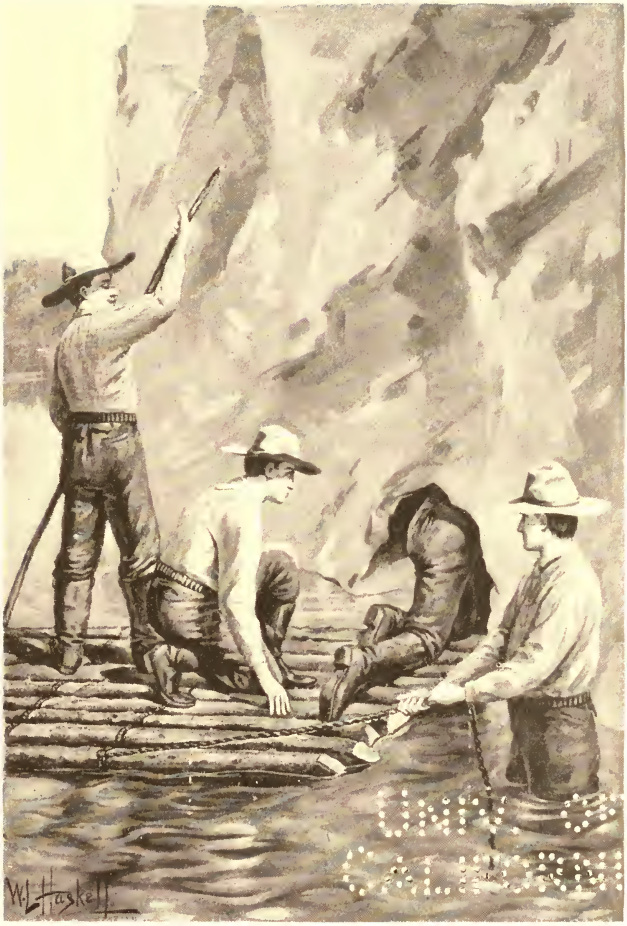
"All fast!" he cried. "You can come ashore!"

Phil went first, then Ken, and lastly, Dave; those entering first, lending a hand to help the others through the aperture.

When all were inside, Dave said:

"Well, boys, here are my coat and boots. You can examine these other things and see what you think they are worth."

As he spoke he pointed to the little heap of nuggets he had left, and picking up the largest, he placed it in Neal's hand.



"NEAL THEN CRAWLED WITHIN."

Ken and Phil were almost breathless with amazement as Neal examined it, after which, with a beaming smile, he passed it to Phil.

"It 's the real stuff, boys. Are these the other pieces, Dave?" he asked, as he stooped and looked over the lot. "About a thousand dollars' worth, I should say. Come, now! Let 's look around and get all the points?"

Neal had brought the pick from the raft, and as Dave led the way along the passage, he followed with the tool in his hand.

Dave stopped at the first cross-passage, saying: "Here is where I found them."

Phil and Ken at once dropped to their knees, and began scraping among the fragments of rock and rubbish.

"Where 's your candle, Dave?" asked Neal.

Dave took the candle from his pocket, striking a match at the same time.

"Let 's see what this side-passage looks like," Neal said.

They turned to the left, the dim light from the tallow candle enabling them to see their way without stumbling.

Ken and Phil, meanwhile, were digging with their fingers in the earth and rubbish. The others had been gone but a few minutes, when Phil cried out exultantly:

"I 've found one! I 've got one! A big one, too!"

Dave and Neal making no response, he glanced down the passageway, but the light from their candle was not visible.

"Let me see, Phil," said Ken, eagerly. "Why, it 's larger than Dave's biggest one! Isn't it magnificent? But, here. Take it. I shall not be happy until I find one of my own!"

He began to dig with energy, and presently shouted:

"Here it is! A small one! O, here 's another! Three! I 've found three; all near together! None are as large as yours, Phil, but I think all together must weigh as much."

"Yes," said Phil. "They will weigh more than mine.

"Say, Ken! Have you noticed what a strange sound our voices have when we shout? They come back with a kind of ghostly roar, from every direction, one echo following another."

"Yes, I think it must be on account of the different passages. But where have Dave and Neal disappeared to? I 've been so busy here that I didn't even notice which way they took. Did you?"

"Yes, they went down to the left. Say, Ken!

Don't you feel as though this experience of the cave and the wonderful nuggets of gold is so astonishing that it 's going to be pretty hard to realize it afterwards?''

''I was thinking that just now,'' replied Ken. ''To be sure, we hear of people discovering mines of great wealth, and every little while an account is given of some marvelous 'find' that has been made, but it all seemed so remote that I never even imagined myself as being a part of it. Even now, if I were to go away, I doubt if I would very long be able to realize that I 've seen these things.''

''Here come the boys!'' cried Phil, and the flickering light of the candle was seen approaching.

As it came nearer, Dave was seen to be carrying the candle and pick, while Neal bore a heavy piece of rock in his hands.

''The cave must be of great extent,'' said Ken, as the others came up. ''You have been out of sight and sound for quite a while.''

''The voice don't carry far in a place like this,'' replied Neal. ''We 've not been far away. The passage takes a sharp uphill slope a few steps from here, and the roof prevented you from seeing our candle. We 've been to the end in that direction—

"Wait a minute, Dave, till I carry this piece of ore down to the entrance; then we will explore a little farther. We must n't stay long, because we ought to be at work on the house."

He was back in a minute, and started with Dave down the main gallery.

"I think I 'll go, too," said Ken.

Whereupon Phil, rising to his feet, remarked:

"The ends of my fingers are getting rather worn. I 'm going to be satisfied with my one nugget for the present. This work needs a pick and shovel."

They followed behind the others, stopping occasionally, with them, to see the features of the different intersecting veins, as Neal pointed them out. These became much less marked as they went farther from the entrance, and at about one hundred feet distance the gallery ended.

Neal, with his pick, dislodged a piece of rock from the end wall of the passage, saying:

"I want to compare some of these by daylight. I think we need n't try to explore the other side-veins. It will take too much time, and can just as well be done later on. I understand the situation (or, *think* I do), and maybe when I examine my specimens I 'll know still more. Let me take one more piece from

the side. There! That will do. Now let 's go!"

They returned to the mouth of the cave, where they gathered up Dave's nuggets, coat, and boots, and crawled back to the raft again.

"That hole can easily be enlarged," said Dave; "but it seems to me we will be wise to let it alone for the present, or until we are pretty secure in our rights."

"Yes, I agree with you," replied Neal.

Then he turned, and glancing up the face of the cliff, he pointed with his finger, saying:

"There 's the vein, boys, as plain as can be. It must run right across the lake and pass down the lower cliff on the right-hand side of the outlet. Well, there 's one thing. Even if somebody else should find it, he might tunnel and cross-cut till he had it 'most chopped to pieces before he 'd ever find the bonanza down below here."

"Yes, that 's so," said Dave; "and if it had n't been for my big-horn and the cold bath he gave me, this thing might have remained hidden for centuries longer. I presume there must be countless things in the mountains as strange and undiscovered. . . . .

"By the way, I wonder what became of the sheep-head. I never saw it from the moment I

threw it off. Under the circumstances, I guess I can spare it. I 'm going to name the new mine the 'Big-Horn.' "

"The head would sink," said Neal. "It 's at the bottom of the lake somewhere."

"Let 's go over now and get the other half of my mutton," said Dave. "It will be easier than packing it away round. . . . .

"Now, Neal, if you 've got your scheme figured out, you might tell us how we can fix things so as to hold the property."

"Well, I 'll tell you what I 'm thinking of," replied Neal.

"Our pack-train will be here within one or two days, and one of the men — the man in charge — is a brother of my old partner, Archie Campbell, the recorder at Gunnison. Now, there ain't an honester, more reliable man in the state of Colorado than Archie; and my idea is to get him to help us, and to pay him by giving him an interest in this claim. . . . .

"I mean, I would propose our sending a letter to Archie by his brother; tell him it 's a big thing, and offer him a fifth interest if he will come up right away and locate the claim in his own name.

"What do you think of it, boys?"

"I think it a first-class plan, and I 'm ready

to take in anybody you recommend, Neal," said Dave.

"So am I," said Phil. "I liked Campbell very much. I believe he 's a fine fellow."

"Yes," said Ken, "I do too. Besides, boys, it will be a good thing for us to have a man like Campbell interested with us. He holds a position where he will be able to keep us posted if anything should come up that might annoy us."

"I 'm glad you all like the plan," returned Neal. "I thought of the same thing Ken speaks of; and it might possibly be worth a whole lot to us. You see, there ain't any reason (in the law) why we can't take up more than one claim apiece here. Ken and I could take another claim each, along this vein; but the time might come when we 'd have to fight to keep off just such sneaks as Brodie (in the law, I mean), and besides, we need more good witnesses.

"You know we are in a lonely, out-of-way place here, and the only man at present, besides our own crowd, who could testify at all, will swear against us if he ever has a chance. One claim at a time ('specially if it 's a rich one) is enough for any one man. It 's an easy thing, always, to make trouble for a fellow who's got a valuable claim (before he's got his patent fixed up). . . . .

"Now here 's this vein that runs across the lake and down the lower cliff — same as the other one. I 'm going to suggest that Archie bring another man with him to locate the extension. We 'll offer him the same terms. Do you all agree to this?"

"Yes," they all said, instantly; and that being settled, Neal resumed: "We 'll get to work now and finish our house."

By this time the raft had touched the shore by the ridge. It required but a minute for Dave to bring his mutton on board, and then they headed for camp, which they reached in a short time.

CHAPTER XIX.

ARRIVAL OF THE PACK-TRAIN.

"Now, boys," said Neal, "while you 're making fast the raft, and begin at chopping logs, I 'm going to make sure about the course of Dave's 'Big-Horn' vein. If it 's over here — as it must be — it won't take me long to find it. I 'll be with you pretty soon," and he struck off through the brush toward the edge of the plateau.

The boys had hardly more than gotten well at work chopping, when he returned, saying:

"I found it without a bit of trouble. It 's a good vein, too, similar to the Telluride in size and formation. I don't think it 's any better, but it 's liable to be as good. The cross-veins and the free-gold deposit over at the cave don't necessarily affect this end of it a bit.

"Now, Dave, as long as you 're a 'teamster,' I think you better harness up the animals, and two of you can haul logs, while two of us chop. With another man I can keep you hustling."

At noon Neal declared there were enough logs

to complete the walls and roof. The burros were therefore set loose, and all hands turned themselves into builders.

So skillful and ready was Neal at the work, and with such zeal did all the boys devote themselves to their task, that by the middle of the afternoon of the following day Neal pronounced the house finished about as far as they could go, until the train arrived.

"We 've got some roofing-paper coming, that we can stretch over the roof-poles, and then we 'll be as snug and dry as if we were at the hotel in Gunnison," said Neal.

"Now, Dave, I think the train will be here to-night. If you 'll be kitchen-artist for the rest of the day, the other boys and I will gather moss and make 'chinking' to stop up the cracks. . . . .

"We 've got some window-sash coming up too, besides a lot of tools. We 'll have a combined house and workshop here that we 'll be proud of, when she 's all fixed up."

"I suppose you 've built many of them, Neal," remarked Phil.

"Yes, indeed. I really don't remember how many," he answered.

The afternoon wore rapidly along, and so much interested was everybody with his work that the

pack-train came very near to arriving among them before they were aware.

Dave was the first to hear the shouts of the drivers, and ran toward the cabin, calling out to the busy workers:

"Tra-a-a-in coming! Cle-e-e-ar the track!"

Instantly all work was dropped, and the whole party gathered at the edge of the plateau nearest camp to watch the interesting and curious sight.

From around a sharp angle of the huge, towering wall of cliff, where the thin line of the trail hung suspended between valley and sky, came a long procession of clean-limbed mules, a large portion of the body of each animal so hidden by his load as to suggest a chattel-bundle with legs.

A man was in advance, and the train was divided into three sections, with one man behind each section of about twelve mules.

One animal would have two heavy casks slung one on either side; another would have a regular pile of bulky, but lighter boxes; another would seem still more overladen beneath mattresses and blankets. A long, motley, and weird caravan it was, considering the wild and savage background of the scene.

Some bore flour, and others provisions; some heavy tools and explosives. One had large, square tins of kerosene oil, and a case of lamps and

fixtures; while the separate and detached pieces of the stove were distributed over the backs of a number of the animals.

Phil counted thirty-four altogether, and the boys all remarked how flagged and worn the poor brutes seemed.

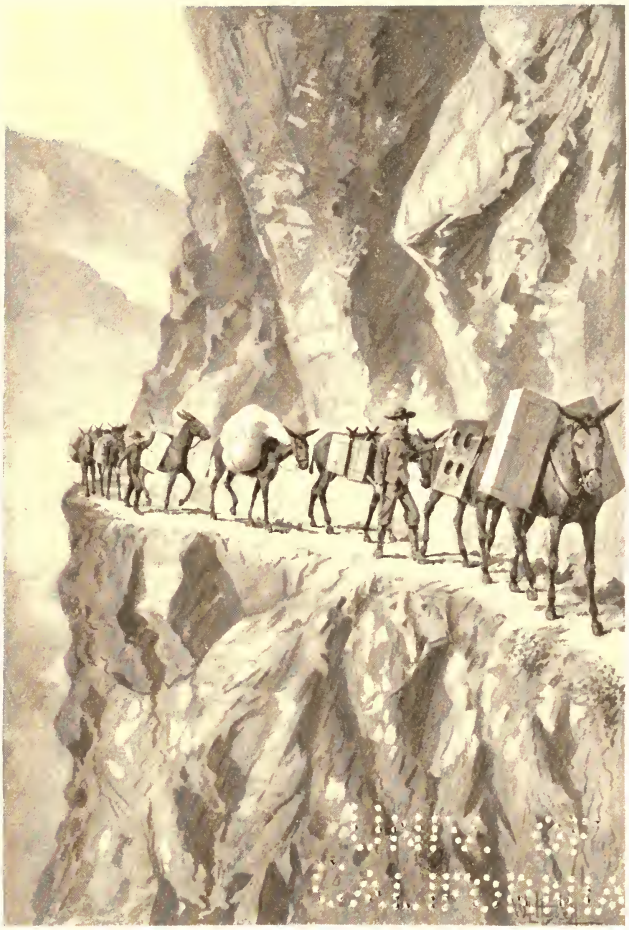
As the mules slowly, and one by one, reached the broad level of the plateau, Neal advanced to the man in the lead and shook hands, saying: "Glad you 've got through all right, Harry. Did you make it without any accident?"

"Ah, Neal! Glad to see you!" returned the man. "The mules are glad to get here, I 'll bet. Do you know, this trail of yours is about the toughest I ever struck? I 've seen bad ones a-plenty, too. It 's not only narrow and dangerous, but a terrible climb. Some of the beasts would n't have held out another mile.

"No, we did n't have any unusual run of bad luck. Lost one mule, but we saved his pack — or the most of it."

As the train began to gather and group around the newly built cabin, everybody went vigorously to work at unpacking.

With eight men this did not require a very long time, and when it was accomplished, the piles of merchandise made up a total rather surprising.



"A LONG PROCESSION OF CLEAN-LIMBED MULES."

The released mules, each and all, first gave themselves the luxury of a good roll, then a long drink at the lake, after which they went eagerly to grazing.

After supper Neal held a conversation with Harry Campbell, and then wrote a short but vigorous letter to Archie, urging him, if he wanted an interest in the best piece of property in the county, to come up without a minute's delay, and bring another good man with him to take up an extension of the same vein.

The camp was astir very early in the morning, as the packers wished to get away at dawn; and as soon as breakfast was over, Neal gave the letter to Harry, saying:

"The sooner Archie gets this, the better he will like it; so I hope you won't have any delay on the road."

"All right, Neal," returned Harry. "I 'll get through before noon to-morrow, if we have good luck."

So saying, and with pleasant "good-bys," the long train of mules — unburdened, except with their "*aparejos*" (or Mexican pack-saddles) — set out, with their shouting drivers, upon their returning and downward journey.

For two or three days little else was done or thought of by our boys than the storing away of

their goods and finishing up and making the house as comfortable as possible.

First, the roof was made thoroughly tight with the tarred paper. The stove was set up, a door made and hung (the material for which was hewn and split out of aspen trunks), bunks were built, and shelves nailed up around the walls.

At last everything was nicely stowed away, and as the boys sat, in the evening, by the light of their oil lamp, all looked smiling and contented, with the exception of Neal.

"Dave," said that usually happy-faced individual, "that supper you cooked on the new stove was all right, and in the morning I 'll try my hand at it for breakfast. I 've cooked on 'em, and of course they 're fine things, 'specially in bad weather; but somehow I guess I 'd always feel more at home with an open fire. One thing is sure: a stove ain't of any use for sociability. This cabin lacks something, and it needs it *bad*. That 's a fireplace. The very first half day I can get a lay-off I 'm going to make one. I can't live here and be happy without it."

This idea was heartily applauded by all the others, who, without having realized what had been lacking, now knew that a fireplace was necessary to their peace of mind.

Then the discussion was begun as to the line of work for the next day.

"I think we had better go to work on the tunnel again, boys," said Neal. "If Archie comes up and we fix him out with the certificate to file on the Big-Horn, then, I imagine, after that we will want to do our easiest and best-paying work first; but until we introduce him to the property, I think we had better let it lie as fresh and undisturbed as possible. Don't you think so?"

"Yes," said the others.

"Besides," Dave continued, "it would n't look manly or dignified to go running off after a new thing, just because it's got more shine and glitter to it than the old. If our first 'find' was as good a thing as we wanted, until we found this last one, it 's good enough to put our best energy on now."

"That 's the way to talk, Davey!" cried Neal, and he looked admiringly at his young mate. "What do you say, Phil; and you, Ken?"

"Dave talks the best kind of sense," said Ken. "Before he described the situation so nicely, I was beginning to sort of wonder what we were going to do with our so numerous interests and great riches. It 's all plain now."

"Well," said Phil, "I 'm not going to deny that the new 'find' takes hold of me with a stronger pull than the old one. It 's fascinating work digging out thirty-ounce nuggets, and I 'd be willing to keep it up, and let all other pursuits go for a good while. I shall never be really contented to work at anything else now, until I feel sure we have scraped out the very last chunk of gold that 's to be found over yonder. Still, I realize the sense of what you fellows say, and at least, you won't find me hanging back in any kind of work that it seems best to do."

There was a loud and hearty laugh at Phil's confession, and Dave said:

"What you say will apply to us all, Phil, and it 's a good thing always to know just how and where we stand. I guess it 's also a good thing for every fellow to discipline himself once in a while."

So it was arranged to resume work on the tunnel early the next morning.

CHAPTER XX.

THE RAID.—NEAL'S CHECKMATE.

During the last few days there had been little thought of trouble from their late acquaintances,—one reason being, perhaps, a sense of security which came from being all together again, and a feeling that there was only one direction from which it would be possible for anyone to approach the plateau.

From the dump at the mouth of the tunnel a clear view could be had of the last long stretch of trail as it neared the shelf. This view had been assisted by clearing away a line of underbrush for some distance, so that there seemed perfect safety from surprise when they were occupied.

All hands were hard at work in and about the tunnel by the time that the morning sunshine had thoroughly lighted up the plateau.

Phil and Ken took their first lesson in practical mining.

Ken and Neal were working at the inner end, or "breast" of the tunnel, and Neal held the

steel drill while Ken struck it with the drill-hammer, or sledge.

Phil and Dave were at work about the mouth. Phil was wheeling out ore and refuse with a wheelbarrow, while Dave was preparing a set of timbers to be used inside.

The ax Dave was using seemed to him to be so dull that, after working with it for some time, his patience became a little strained, so he started with it for the camp, saying:

"There 's a sharper one in the cabin. I 'll go and get it."

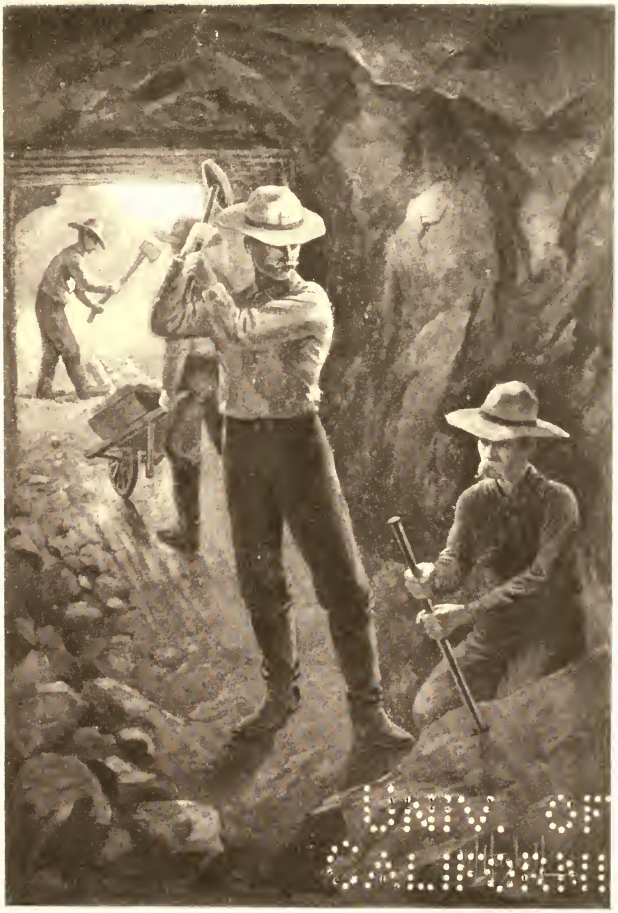
He walked quickly to the camp, and, after exchanging axes, was about to return, when it occurred to him that there had been no drinking-water taken out to the tunnel.

"I 'll get a bucketful from the lake, and take it over," he said.

Taking a pail from the cabin he started down the path, which had now become well worn by daily use; and, as he drew nearer to the water, something reminded him of the morning, a few days before, when his eye had caught the reflection of the mountain sheep.

He paused, saying:

"I wonder if I 've scared the poor beasts so they 'll never come back here again," and ran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"Their first lesson in practical mining."

his eyes up and down the cliff beyond the lake, where had been the scene of his curious adventure.

The glow of sunlight all over the mountain-side was so full and strong, that, for a minute, the details of ledge and seam did not become visible. Gradually, though, the markings began to take shape, and his gaze rested upon the high point where he had crouched when he fired and brought down the ram.

Something was stirring up there, and Dave smiled with pleasure to think that he might still be able to admire their activity and grace; when suddenly, the moving thing stood out in clearer relief, as it came to a spot where the rocks behind were in shadow.

Then he almost dropped his pail in astonishment, to see that it was a man.

For an instant he felt so strongly inclined to doubt the evidence of his eyesight that he looked down toward the ground, that he might make another test. But in another moment there was no room for skepticism; as the figure stood still, and was beckoning with its hand in the direction from which it came.

Fortunately Dave was standing in the bushes; and now he dropped upon his knees, so that he

could look through the branches and remain wholly screened.

Now, to his astonishment, there appeared, at a little distance behind the first figure, a file of five other men creeping carefully along down the ledge in the same direction.

"It 's Brodie and his precious outfit, as sure as I 'm alive! We 're in for trouble now!"

Without pausing for another instant, he crawled back through the bushes until he reached thick and high timber, when he started for the tunnel as fast as he could run, keeping the foliage between himself and the cliff.

Arriving at the tunnel, he burst, breathless and excited, upon the three busy miners, exclaiming:

"Brodie and his crowd are here! They 're coming down the cliff above the lake! Coming by the very same ledge I used when I brought down my sheep! Come quick! We 're bound to have a fight, and we must get our rifles!"

"Well, I 'm not sorry to settle it with them," cried Phil. "If they *must* have a fight, we 'll give them one!"

Neal simply said:

"Wait a minute, boys! We must act all together, and with common sense, now! Are you willing to let me be captain in this scrimmage?"

"He almost dropped his pail in astonishment."

"Yes!" was the unanimous reply.

"All right then! We 're now under military rule for a while! Dave, as I understood your account of the ledge yonder, it runs out at the lake, and they won't be able to get to the bottom without throwing themselves down into the water. Do you s'pose they 're so foolish or so whisky-mad as to do that?"

"Oh! Good gracious, Neal!" gasped Dave. "I 've never once thought of it until this minute, but my rope still hangs fastened tightly where I left it! They can climb it, as I did, and come right along to the ridge of rocks over in the corner!"

Neal 's eyes were shining with a light that, to Ken, seemed something like fierce anticipation — almost of happiness.

"Now, boys," he said, "if I 'm commander, you 're to do exactly as I say; and you 're not to do a thing except when I give you permission! The first thing is to get our guns from the cabin! Dave, show us back by the way you came, through the trees!"

Quickly, but cautiously, they made their way to the little clearing next to the house, where they paused.

"Dave, do you think they 're down low enough by this time so they 'll not be able to see into

the clearing? We must n't let them see us. They 've planned to surprise us when we were all at the tunnel, working, and now I want to give them the surprise."

"I don't know for certain, Neal, but let me do this. I 'll run around to the farther side of the cabin,—keeping hidden in the brush all the time,—and get the guns and bring them back the same way."

"Good idea, Dave! But, as you 're to obey orders, you stay right here, and I 'll go!" and away he went with a speed and deft gliding motion through the bushes, that would have done credit to an Arapahoe scout.

They did not have long to wait. He was back among them almost before they were aware of it.

"Now," he said, "I 'll lead! All follow me! Here, each of you take his own rifle, and examine it carefully, to see if it 's all right and the magazine full! All ready? Come then!"

He started off through the bushes in the direction of the outlet to the lake. His progress was so swift that all the others had to strain to keep up with him.

When they reached the stream, and had crossed upon the log, Neal stopped, and said:

"The line of trees ends a short distance from

here, but if the men are down low enough, we can slip along behind the rocks without being seen! When we get to the edge of the timber, all of you stay hid while I go ahead to spy a little! If I beckon to you once, I want only Dave; if more than once, you can all come, but keep out of their sight behind the rocks!"

They kept on to the limit of the trees, when Neal raised his hand, and all paused. Then, cautiously making his way among the rocks to the highest point, he peered over toward the cliff.

A moment more and he crept back until well down the slope, then beckoned three times, whereupon all three boys hastened to join him.

"They can't see us if we keep along the base of the ridge," he whispered. "They 've got to the rope now, and Brodie is giving directions. We must hurry, but do it mighty careful! About two hundred feet farther on is a fine place for us to make a stand. We 'll be sheltered from them, and within fine rifle range!"

In a few minutes he paused again, and whispered:

"Right here 's the place! I 'll go up ahead! You see the little clump of jack-pines at the top? They 'll screen us, and we 'll have a chance to keep behind the rocks, besides!"

He was up in a moment, and after glancing through the limbs, beckoned for the others.

The boys instantly ran up to his side, and beheld an interesting sight. Three men were already upon the upper ledge, and three were still below, one of whom was preparing to ascend the rope. Brodie was among the three who were below, and the rifles were all together in a leaning stack on the lower shelf.

While they looked, the fourth man grasped the rope and began to climb; and, as he dangled there against the side of the mountain, Neal's plan of action shaped itself in his mind,—all in the space of a minute.

Turning to the boys, who were all close at his elbow, he said quietly, but with great earnestness:

"Boys, I made up my mind from the start that there 's to be no *killing* here, if we can get along without it, and protect ourselves at the same time; but you can see that the time has come for a prompt move, and it 's got to be a strong one! Whatever happens, remember, I wanted to avoid bloodshed! I 'm going to shoot just as the next man goes up the rope! That 's Brodie! You see he 's next! But don't any of the rest of you shoot! Wait till I tell you! . . .

"The fourth man is up, and see! There goes Brodie! Mind, I don't mean to *kill!*"

Thrusting his rifle through the branches, Neal took a steady and careful sight. Brodie was two-thirds of the way up when Neal's rifle cracked, and the suspended man fell like a log, still clutching the rope which waved wildly in the air.

He struck the lower ledge with his feet, but his equilibrium was wholly lost; and, clutching vainly at the air, with a wild scream he toppled and went whirling down the sheer descent to the lake below. He turned a half somerset, struck the water head foremost, and with a mighty splash, disappeared.

This occupied but a moment; and, before the knave's companions were able to quite realize what had occurred, Neal pumped another cartridge into his gun and aimed a second time.

Just as Brodie vanished from sight, he fired again, and the remaining — or sixth — man, still on the lower ledge, staggered, clutched his right arm with his left hand, and fell, limp and helpless, upon the ledge.

He managed to grasp a rim of rock, however, and thus saved his balance; but yelled in a terror-stricken voice:

"I 'm killed! Oh, I 'm killed!"

Neal gave a quiet chuckle, saying:

"Checkmate, in two moves! You can come out, boys. They 're harmless as suckin' doves now!"

Saying thus, he arose and stepped from behind the covert into full and bold view.

The boys had grasped the situation as quickly as it had been presented to them. Neal's first careful shot had done exactly what he intended. It severed the rope squarely in two, and left the four men on the upper shelf, cut off from their rifles, besides throwing the fifth — and most dangerous — into the lake and out of the rumpus.

The second shot disabled the right arm of the sixth man, so that it was impossible for him to make use of any of the firearms.

"The suspended man fell like a log."

CHAPTER XXI.

PHIL'S AQUATICS.— RESCUE OF BRODIE.

As our four boys came out from their hiding-place, however, the desperadoes, with the instinct of badgers at bay, put on a momentary fierce courage. Drawing their revolvers, they fired a fusillade of shots, every one of which fell short, by reason of the distance.

Then Neal brought his rifle to his shoulder, took aim again, and simultaneously with his shot the pistol dropped from the hand of one of the men. A cry of horrified conviction broke from them all, and they screamed:

"We give in! We surrender! For God's sake, don't shoot!"

Without lowering his rifle, except to pump in another cartridge, Neal thundered in reply:

"Now, every man jack of you, throw your pepper-boxes into the lake! I 'll give you thirty seconds!"

There was but one instant's hesitation; then four revolvers in quick succession splashed into the lake. Even the man with the wounded hand had stooped and tossed over his fallen pistol.

"Now, Dave!" said Neal; "you look after the fellow on the lower ledge! He shows animation, and there might be a little cussedness left in him! I 'm going to attend to Brodie! We must n't let him drown! Where is he? Can you see him?"

"I 've been watching him!" cried Phil. "He was swimming this way only a moment ago! I know right where he must have gone down! He 's drowning! Let me go, Neal!"

Phil had thrown off his jacket and laid down his gun, and was now struggling to remove his boots.

"Well, go quick, then, Phil; if you 're sure you know where he went down, and think you can get him," returned Neal.

Without further words Phil kicked off his boots, threw down his hat, and ran rapidly down the hill to the shore.

With a dozen flying steps along the edge of the water, a light spring to a shelving rock, then a long, curving leap, and Phil shot head foremost into the glassy lake and toward the bottom.

"Watch out for him, Ken, to see if he needs any help!" cried Neal. "Dave and I can attend to these fellows!"

The cause of this immediate tumult — the small but energetic Mr. Brodie — had during this

time been undergoing not merely a change of fortunes, but sufferings of both mind and body that were most agonizing.

After his reluctant header into the lake,— from which he rose to the surface chilled and confused, but quite uninjured,— he swam aimlessly for a minute, and then headed directly for the cliff in front of him. Reaching there, he quickly saw that there could be no escape that way, nor even any relief, except such support as he could derive from clutching with his fingers a narrow two-inch projection.

Here, half strangled, and shivering from the icy coldness of the water, he hung, until, seeing the inevitable end of remaining there, he let go and started to swim toward the ridge where our boys were standing. But the coldness of the water, together, perhaps, with the weakening effects of his late debauch, were more than his powers of endurance were equal to. He struggled on in gasping, spasmodic fashion, neared the shore, tried to touch bottom with his toes, missed it, and was seized with a cramp.

His bubbling cry was unheard, but his progress had been noticed by Phil, who knew where he had gone down, even though he did not actually see him sink.

Phil was a magnificent swimmer, and, in diving

head downward he rightly calculated that the cold would be less of a shock than if he were to enter the water upright. Nevertheless, it seemed to pierce through almost to his very marrow, and at first he was unable to open his eyes.

Fortunately the water was not extremely deep at this point.

His plunge and downward glide carried him to the bottom at a distance of about thirty feet from the shore, and when he at length succeeded in holding his eyes open he found he could see distinctly.

Brodie was on the bottom only a few feet in front of him. He was half doubled up, his eyes were open and staring, and he was making only faint, mechanical motions with his hands. It was evident that he had become strangled and had lost consciousness.

Another stroke, and Phil was behind him and had him by the collar. Then doubling himself up, and striking the ground with his feet, he gave a powerful upward push and slowly rose to the surface.

Ken was standing on the rock from whence he had dived, with a strained and anxious look in his eyes, and seemed just on the point of plunging in, when Phil called out in a strong but spluttering voice:

"Don't come in! I've got him, and I'm all right! Stay there and help me haul him up!"

His burden was a heavy one, and he was numb with cold, but it did not take him very long to drag the passive Brodie within reach of Ken's outstretched arm, and both were quickly lying upon the rock.

Pausing only to catch his breath, Phil said:

"We must roll him! He isn't dead yet! We can bring him back, if we work hard!"

Quickly acting according to his words, Phil seized the inert body by the feet, calling to Ken to help carry him, and together they drew him to the slope, and laid him with his feet up the hill and head downward. Then turning him upon his face, Phil began to work over him with a sort of pumping action, so that in a moment the water began to gush from his lungs.

That Brodie was not dead became evident very quickly; for, after ejecting a great quantity of water, there came, in a few minutes, a rattling gurgle. Another gush of water, then a louder groan,— evidently from the pain in his lungs,— and soon the man was almost shrieking in his agony.

This was over very soon though, and Mr. Brodie was able to breathe quite naturally, and in a little while longer was able to speak.

Neal and Dave meanwhile had other things to do than notice the progress of this experiment.

As Ken was following Phil down to the water's edge, Neal spoke to Dave, saying:

"Now what are we going to do with the fellow on the lower ledge? He 's hurt,— but not badly,— and it 'll need one man to watch him as long as he 's within reach of the guns. We can't pull him up, or go down to him, because we 've got no rope. Shall we make him throw all the guns into the lake?"

"I believe that 's the surest and simplest way of keeping out of trouble," said Dave. "I think we need n't feel badly about destroying property. We would have to keep the guns away from them as long as they 're our prisoners, and we neither want the weapons ourselves, nor ought to be bothered with carrying them about or watching them. Yes, let 's make him do it!"

"All right," returned Neal. "We 'll move up nearer, so as to be within easy speaking distance."

Dave paused one moment to look anxiously toward the water where Phil had vanished, but just then that young man's head appeared above the surface, and, as his call to Ken was reassuring, Dave hurried along after Neal.

When within about seventy or eighty feet of the cliff, Neal paused and gave the entire group of shamefaced, mean-looking wretches a contemptuous scrutiny.

Then he spoke, saying:

"Guess you fellows ain't much used to the ways of good society. You ought to 've known it 's the proper thing when you go to visit folks of *our* standing, to send word ahead that you 're coming. It 's nicer to go to the *front* door, too. If you 'd done that, we 'd prob'ly just told you we was n't receivin' to-day, and we 'd be glad to have you come 'round this time next year, or the year after. Then, you see, there would n't been any harm done. You six gents would have just turned round and had a deuce of a foot-race down the trail (to work off your embarrassment), and we 'd have kept right along at our work. . . .

"Of course, you did n't mean any harm by coming upon us this way; but, you see, you startled us; and you know how apt a man is to give his mule the lash when he stumbles. Well, it 's too bad. I guess it 's the mule-*driver* that needs the lashing more than the animals, and when the boys get some of the water pumped out of your capt'n, I 've got to talk to *him* a little.

"Now, please stay right where you are a

while longer, and then we 'll try and fix you out proper. I say, there! Mr. Joseph Helmer!"

Neal thus addressed the man on the lower ledge.

"I believe that 's the name you owned up to the other day. There was a time, years ago, when you went by another one — Pete Simpson. Does your memory stretch far enough back for that, or have you had so many of 'em since, that you can't straighten 'em out?"

This speech had a curious effect upon the ruffian, who started and trembled so that he came near to falling off the ledge into the water; but he managed to stammer, with ashen lips:

"What d' ye mean? I ain't never had no other name than Helmer."

"I did n't s'pose you 'd remember it; it 's so long ago. But *my* memory was always pretty fair, and it 's been still better since the fall when I lived up near Eureka. We 'll have a good chat about that by and by. . . .

"What I want you to do now is to reach for those rifles and drop every one of 'em into the lake. Do it quick, and look pleasant while you 're doing it! Another thing: you better grab each one of them near the muzzle! They may be loaded, and if you fool with the trigger, you 'll only make yourself appear silly! Come,

hurry up! My boys here are liable to get impatient, and I can't be responsible for 'em!"

Neal hereupon motioned to Dave, and both brought their guns to bear upon the shrinking wretch, who gasped:

"Don't fire! Don't shoot! I 'm hit already! I 'll throw the guns over!"

"You ain't much hurt!" returned Neal. "Talk about being hit! You ought to 've seen me after the 'blow-up' over at Eureka! Come, move lively! It makes me nervous when I think about that time, and my gun might go off again!"

Trembling and moaning, probably from both fear and pain, Helmer crept to the rifles, and, taking them with his left hand, one by one, tossed them into the lake.

"That 's right!" said Neal. "Things are getting into real tidy shape. Now, Dave, there 's one thing more that 's got to be done. One of us will have to go to camp and get a rope to haul him up with. I guess it 's best for me to stay here; so you better go. After that we can take 'em all into custody in good order. Get plenty of rope!" and he looked meaningly at Dave, who nodded and started for the camp at a rapid pace.

CHAPTER XXII.

DRESS PARADE.—THE SHERIFF.

It did not take Dave very long to make the trip to and from camp; and during the time he was away there was no change in the situation.

Neal, after stating in emphatic terms to the five men over whom he stood guard that he expected them to remain where they were, and that the first man who tried to move away would get into serious trouble, walked along the ridge to a point where he could see and converse with Phil and Ken without relaxing his watch over the prisoners.

By this time Brodie was sitting up, and the boys had ceased their work of restoration; as it now seemed only a matter of time when the man would fully recover himself.

He was a pitiable-looking object, though; and as Neal stood looking down from above at the pale, shivering, and drooping creature, he could not find it in his heart to fling him the bitter jibes that rose to his lips. He merely remarked:

"Well, Phil, my boy, I hope Brodie will be

able to appreciate the good job you 've done for him. I think, now, you 'd better wring out your own clothes and put on your jacket. I don't s'pose you 're feeling very warm and comfortable."

"O, I 'm all right!" returned Phil. "I 've had plenty of good, lively exercise since I came ashore, and I feel first rate. The dry jacket and shoes will come in handy now, though!"

By the time Dave reached them with the rope, the boys had returned to the ridge and picked up their rifles, and were again ready for active business.

A brief consultation was held as to what their line of action ought to be, and Neal concluded by saying:

"We must make the rascals do the work that naturally belongs to them. We 'll give them a rope, and tell them to hoist Helmer up to where they are. Then we 'll march the whole squad of 'em to camp. I 'm sure we don't want 'em there, and I don't know yet what to do with 'em. It makes me mad to think of being bothered with the low-down rubbish, but we 'll think up some way of getting rid of the outfit in quick time. I bet they 'll think over it a good while before they feel ready to come again." Then he called out in a louder voice:

"Hello, there, Brodie! You 'll have to come up the hill! We want you where we can keep you in sight, along with the rest of your friends."

Brodie made some reply, the words of which could not be distinguished; but his manner seemed humble and passive enough, for he arose slowly to his feet, and began a weak and trembling ascent of the slight hill.

"Now, Ken, I think you had better stay here and keep his mind out of mischief. He don't look a bit dangerous, but we may as well be on the safe side. The rest of us will go over and attend to the gang. By the way. Did you take his pistol away from him?"

"Yes. Here it is! I found it while we were rolling him," returned Phil.

"All right! I guess you 'll have an easy enough job, Ken! Come, boys!"

The three men moved over to the cliff, where the men were waiting in sullen silence.

When they reached the place of Neal and Dave's previous stand, Neal called out:

"I want one of you fellows to come and get this rope!"

There was a brief hesitancy, as none of the party seemed to understand what sort of plans were being made. Neal then spoke again, — this time sharply:

"Come! Move along! We want you to pull Helmer up to where the rest of you are!"

This seemed to have a reassuring effect, for one of them, no longer believing that any trick was intended, came along the shelf toward Dave, who met him and handed him a coil of rope.

"Now, then," said Neal, in his commanding tone, "I want you to let the line down to where Helmer is; three of you hang on to it, and one man slip down to where Helmer is and make the end fast around him, so that he can be hauled up. He 's hurt, and won't be able to make a very good hitch with one hand."

The reasonableness of this order seemed so plain that it was carried out at once, and without any protests.

In a few minutes a man had slid down the rope and made it fast around Helmer, waiting below until that troubled-looking person was safely landed upon the upper shelf, after which he, in turn, was assisted to return.

"That 's very well done," said Neal. "Now you can all march right down this way for further instructions."

This order also was obeyed at once, and all five of the men trooped down in single file and stood in front of the boys.

"Maybe it won't seem very neighborly, but we 'll

have to go through the ceremony now of tying your hands before we start for camp," resumed Neal. "We've had all the bother and delay from you fellows that we can stand, and we're going to take no chances on any more of it, now that we've got you rounded up proper."

"Not much, you won't." "We ain't goin' to be tied," came from two or three of them at once.

"Oh! You won't let us? Give me your gun, Dave! Take your rope and step behind that last man there! Now, then, Willie, or whatever your borrowed name is, put your hands behind you! The first man who tries to make a row won't find time to spread the mutiny!" saying which, he raised his rifle to his shoulder, and was followed by Phil.

It is needless to say there was no attempt at resistance, and Dave quickly tied the hands of three of the men behind their backs.

"We won't tie Helmer and the other man that's hurt," said Neal. "Come to think of it, let's see your hand," he said, turning to the burly ruffian whom he had disarmed so neatly while he was trying his pistol-practice upon the boys.

The man extended his hand, which was wrapped up in a dirty red cotton handkerchief,

and began carefully, and with many grimaces of pain, to undo the bandage.

When he had removed the rag, Neal looked the hand all over carefully, and then remarked:

"Well, you 're in luck, and you need n't make a lot of fuss over *that* hand. It 's badly bruised and the flesh torn, that 's all. The ball must have struck the pistol and glanced. The bones ain't injured, and your fist will be as good as new in a day or two. I guess you 'd better tie him too, Dave. That makes four. We 'll let Helmer and Brodie go without till we get to camp. If we 're all ready, let 's move! You lead, Dave! We 'll follow!"

Ken and Brodie fell into the line of march, as it reached them, Ken in the lead with Dave, and Brodie in the rear watched over by Phil, and so the procession wended its way toward camp.

The bridge was safely crossed, and the camp was neared within a reasonable length of time without further mishap or delay.

They had reached the edge of the clear space within which the cabin stood, when Dave suddenly stopped and held up his hand, calling out:

"Hullo, here! Is this another squad of the same outfit?"

He half raised his rifle to his shoulder, as two

men arose from the bench beside the cabin door and stood quietly waiting for them to approach.

They were strangers to Dave, and while their manner was not calculated to arouse suspicions of unfriendliness, their mere presence seemed, under the circumstances, to call for a hasty explanation.

Suddenly, however, Neal spoke, saying hurriedly:

"Put down your gun, Dave! It 's Archie Campbell!" Then, without the least showing of excitement, he added:

"Move along with the company. This ain't a first-class halting-place here in the brush. When we get to the house we will detail somebody for guard-duty, and then we can palaver."

So the file of ten men marched in an orderly and business-like procession across the clearing to the house, until, as they confronted the new arrivals, Neal called, "Halt!" Then, when all came to a standstill, he added:

"Dave, you and Phil look after the prisoners for a few minutes. Well! Archie old man, how are you, and what sort of a trip did you have? This is the sheriff,—Mr. Harvey,—ain't it? How do you do, Mr. Harvey?"

This greeting was in Neal's ordinary hearty manner, and with no suggestion in the tone of

his voice that there was anything extraordinary in thus welcoming his friends in the guise of a conquering chieftain, and at the head of a company of his overthrown and shackled enemies.

As he advanced to Archie with outstretched hand, he saw that his friend was shaking with suppressed laughter; while the sheriff, as his eyes ranged back and forth from the tall mountaineer to the group behind him, was evidently scrutinizing the entire scene from the standpoint of an enthusiastic and competent critic.

"How d'y do, Neal?" exclaimed Archie. "I beg pardon for laughing, but it almost seems as if you 'd been getting up a dress-parade for our special benefit. It 's a great catch you 've made, though, and an elegant clean job! Don't you think so, Bob? You understand the fine points of this kind of work!"

By this time Harvey was shaking hands with Neal,— which he did with evidences of the keenest admiration and regard.

"How did you do it so smooth and sleek?" he asked. "It 's just beautiful! I never did as neat a thing myself, and it 's my regular line of business, too! Can't you tell us the whole story?" he asked in an eager voice.

"O yes. Ken you tell the yarn. Phil, you better go and put on some dry clothes, and hunt

up a woolen shirt and pair of trousers for Brodie, too. There 's some old ones of mine in the house. Dave, you stand watch a while longer, until I examine Helmer's arm, and then we 'll give you a relief."

"It's a great catch you've made."

CHAPTER XXIII.

NEAL'S NARRATIVE.— THE SENTENCE OF JUSTICE.

Neal turned to Helmer and motioned to him to come nearer.

"Now, then, let 's see if you can move your arm?" he said to the wounded man.

Helmer made a laborious effort, evidently accompanied by the most severe pain, for his face took on changing and varied distortions; but the result showed that the arm was not injured beyond repair, for he was able to move it slightly, even down to the fingers.

"I guess it might be worse," said Neal. "We 'll look at it."

He unbuttoned the shirt-sleeve and rolled it up clear to the shoulder,— where he found the wound to be.

Then he procured a basin of water and carefully washed out the wound, saying, as its extent and character gradually became plain:

"It 'll take you more than a day or two to get over it, but it ain't serious. The ball made a regular groove in the bone, but the shoulder-

joint is all right, and the thing will mend with time and care. I 've got something that 'll make a good dressing for it."

After applying his lotion and bandaging the wounded shoulder, he dismissed his patient, pointing out a bench upon which he might recline; and Helmer was not slow in availing himself of this permission.

By this time Ken had finished his account of the episode, and Phil had effected the change Neal recommended, including that for Brodie; (but he had been very careful not to lose sight of this uncertain individual during his toilet process).

Neal now found time to devote more of his attention to the guests.

"Well, Archie," he said, "I 'm not only glad to see you, but we 're all mighty glad you brought along so good a man as Mr. Harvey. I think I 'm safe in saying that neither of you will be sorry for coming. We 'll go over the details of the matter when we 're a little more free from the eyes and ears of folks who can't sympathize with us," and he looked around at their six prisoners.

"Yes," returned Archie, "I knew you 'd be glad to have Bob. When I proposed it to him he said 'Yes' right off, as he has a first-class

deputy to take care of things for him. Say! This sky-parlor of yours up here is a great place, ain't it?"

Neal bent down and said in a tone too low for the prisoners to hear:

"When we 've shown you all the sights, you 'll think it 's the greatest place you ever saw."

Then, raising his voice to its customary pitch, he said:

"I 've got a little yarn of my own that I want to spin for the benefit of the entire audience. It 's a kind of funny story, and you might as well all get ready to laugh. I believe Ken is the only one that 's heard it, unless, maybe, Dave — and I don't remember ever telling even him. By the way! Here, Dave! You can slacken up on your guard-duty, and come and sit down with the rest of us. We can all be on guard together now.

"Excuse me, Dave, for almost forgetting that you 've not met our friends from Gunnison. Archie, this is our boy, Dave Ballard! Dave, this is Mr. Bob Harvey, the sheriff!"

After this informal ceremony was over, Neal began with his story; relating in a half-humorous way and with no trace of excitement, the full details of the adventure he had told to Ken the day that they were walking together down the trail.

When he had finished, he paused for a mo-

ment; then resumed, almost as though he were talking to himself:

"I 've made a curious and interestin' discovery to-day. I ain't yet been quite able to make up my mind whether it 's a pleasant discovery or not. The two fellows who did that low-down, mean job are right here in this crowd. At that time they went by the names of Dick Bender and Pete Simpson. . . .

"That 's Pete laid out there with a hole in his shoulder; and here 's Mr. Dick Bender, who 's lately been piling up insult and ingratitude on top of the old injury." He pointed at the trembling and shrinking Brodie. "It 's a pretty bad case, gentlemen. What do you think ought to be done?"

"Well!" came with explosive force from Harvey; "I 'm sheriff, and s'posed to be guardian of the peace, and of the majesty of the law; but this here 's a case that, maybe, don't call for court practice! I reckon the sheriff had better go back to Gunnison alone,— because he 's got very important business there,— and let the mountain law of 'eternal vigilance' take its course!"

"Do whatever you've a mind to, Neal. There's nobody here but what 'll approve of it," said Archie.

Neal sat in silence for a few minutes, then spoke slowly, and in a low voice:

"For years I 've thought it would give me a lot of pleasure to kill these men; but since this morning I 've had a rather funny change of heart.

"In the first place, you see, I 've already *had* about as much revenge as a reasonable man ought to need. One of 'em 's shot and laid up, and the other one has had an hour or two of about as bad living as a man *could* have; and, besides, he 's been as far over the border-line into the other world as any one ever got, *without staying there*. . . .

"The idea 's been taking strong hold of me since our procession started for camp, a little while ago, that there 's no telling in this world how far a man's bringing up, and the whirl of life, are responsible for his character. . . .

"Naturally, we despise these fellows for their sneaking, low-down ways; but maybe, in the way they were raised, or in the hard luck they 've had, they ain't had an even start with the rest of us, or a real fair show. . . .

"The more I think about it, the more it seems to me that according to a man's run of hardship or bad luck, the world might make most any kind of character out of most any man. Anyway, — with the permission of all you people

('specially of the sheriff), — I 'm going to give 'em a show this time, and let 'em all go free."

For a little while everybody seemed to be stricken dumb by Neal's declaration.

Harvey was the first one to speak, and he said:

"Well! Neal, the idea that strikes me the hardest is, that these fellows have had wonderful big luck in falling into the hands of a man like you. It ain't possible for me to look at the matter just as you do; and really, I s'pose it 's my duty — under the law — to run these men in and let 'em have the hottest stuff the court can give 'em. But . . . they 're your prisoners, not mine. I won't interfere. Do what you please. . . . Besides, although I 've generally got no patience with professional criminals, there 's lots of truth in what you say."

The latter portion of the talk had been carried on in an undertone, so that the prisoners, — who were grouped together at a little distance away, — could not hear.

"I s'pose our three boys here have a right to say something about this matter," said Neal at length. "Let 's have it, boys! What 's your judgment?"

"Your plan is just what I would myself have proposed," whispered Ken eagerly. "Don't you think the same, Phil?"

"Well, yes," returned Phil. "So far as I 'm concerned, I feel willing to let them off with what they 've already had. Brodie has had every bit of wickedness taken out of him this morning — for an hour at least. I never saw anybody suffer more than he did, and I believe he 'll not only remember it, but he won't feel so very ugly towards us, either. Yes, let 's turn them loose."

"What 's your opinion, Dave?" asked Neal.

"O, I 'm with you, Neal," replied Dave. "You 're really the one to decide it, because it 's a thing of long standing and greater injury. So far, though, as my opinion goes, I believe it might do the men more good to turn them away without any further punishment, than to give them over to the law."

"Thank you, boys! It makes me feel a little more certain of myself, to get your indorsement," said Neal. "Now, as long as we 've concluded to send 'em away, I s'pose there 's no need of keeping ourselves in an uncomfortable state of mind by having these fellows around here. Let 's get the thing over with, and then we can move along about our business. Hey, there, Brodie! Come here! I want to talk to you!" he called in a louder tone.

With the startled and trembling air of a man who awaited the sentence of death, Brodie tot-

tered slowly toward the group of judges, and stood looking in an almost appealing way from one to the other.

"Have you got anything to say for yourself?" asked Neal.

The shock of combined physical suffering and terror which Brodie had undergone had wrought a wonderful change in the man's countenance and general air. His face had lost its mean, animal-like look, and might very well have inspired mercy in any but a judge of iron inflexibility. He started to speak, stammered, and broke down, tried again, and finally managed to say, thickly:

"What 's the use? Talkin' ain't goin' to do us no good."

"It might depend on the *kind* of talk," replied Neal. "Talk has done a heap of things in this world. Now, just to get your idea of things, I 'd like to have you tell us what you 'd do, s'posing you were in our place and we in yours? You 'd make pretty short work, would n't you?"

Brodie's face dropped, and his lips twitched nervously. He made no reply for a few moments, but at length answered, slowly:

"It might depend on whether we 'd been gittin' much likker."

Then with a little more energy, and with

something like genuineness in his manner, he began to talk eagerly.

"When I done the theayter-play act,— bein' sick on the trail,— I 'd no idee this here was *your* camp, Mr. McInnes. I 've allus bin 'shamed o' that blowin'-up job, an' I wuz glad ye come out of it good as ye did. When I fust rec'nized ye, I sort o' weakened on this bizness, and thought I 'd just sneak away and drop it right there; but after I 'd listened to you fellers talk, an' tumbled to the size of the bonanza ye had,— the assays, ye know, an' all that,— my meanness all come back, an' I just said to myself, I 'd put up a scheme to make ye divvy with us. . . .

"Well," he continued, after drawing a long breath, "when ye sprung the 'royal flush' on us and give us the horse-laugh down to Gunnison, we wus all so mad that we did n't think o' much else than gittin' revenge, an' of course the bad whisky made it worse. So we come up here,— an' you 've done us up slick an' brown. . . .

"Mebbe it 's jest as well. I ain't never bin no good to myself nor nobody else, an' I 'm tired o' bein' a tough an' outlaw. If ye 're goin' to give us 'vigilante' justice, I hope ye 'll let us have it military-like. It 's awful to be hung!" and the poor wretch's face took on a look of horror.

"See here, Dick!" said Neal. "If we let

you fellows all go, will you try and behave yourself hereafter, and try to get the rest of your crowd to do the same?"

"What?" he exclaimed, in a voice of pitiful wonderment. "Are ye talkin' 'bout turnin' us loose?"

"Yes. That is, if it 's worth while. We want to know, though, whether you can stand that kind of good luck. That 's the idea."

"Mr. McInnes," said Brodie (or Bender) earnestly, "if ye do it, I swear I 'll do my very best. I 'll go to work like a man, and if I can keep clear o' the likker I 'll be able to make a go of it. I 'll do all I can to brace the other fellers up, too."

"I 'm going to take you on that promise," said Neal, heartily. "Dave, you fix up a sack of grub, to last 'em till they can make some other camp, and I 'll untie their hands.

"Now, Mr. Harvey," he said, turning to the sheriff, "after thanking you for your kindness, I feel as though it 's proper to turn these men over to you for whatever parting advice you want to give 'em."

"I 've not much to say!" said Harvey in a clear ringing voice. "Only this! You fellows must understand this is all Mr. McInnes's doing. I 'm acting on the principle that you 're not my

prisoners at all! You 've all heard what 's been said, and what Brodie has promised for you. Now, if there 's a spark of manliness in your hearts, you 'll all be thankful for getting better treatment than you deserve, and act on the square after this. I don't believe there 's another man in Colorado who 'd give you the deal you 're getting from Neal McInnes. I only hope you 'll try and remember it. That 's all!''

Nothing more was said until Dave came from the cabin with a bag well filled with provisions; by which time Neal had finished untying the prisoners, and then he spoke again, saying:

"Here 's a bag of eatables, Dick, and here 's a strap to pack it with; you can take turn-about amongst you for that. Now, I guess none of us care about visiting any longer, and we 've got other business on hand, so you might as well say 'good-by.' The trail 's open. Good luck to you!''

"Good-by!'' returned Brodie. "Same to you!'' and the salutation was repeated by one other voice. The rest seemed too bewildered or too sullen to reply, but walked silently away toward the trail, down which they were seen by their watchers to proceed in quiet and orderly file.

When the last of the six men had disappeared around the spur of the mountain, beyond which

the trail could no longer be seen, Neal turned to their guests, who, with the boys, had gathered at the edge of the plateau to witness the departure, saying:

"The ceremonies seem to be over, and now I s'pose you would like to know something of the scheme I wrote about in such hot haste.

"Come into the house, and we can talk while I 'm helping Dave get dinner. He 's at it already, I guess. Of course, you 're tired, and I 'll bet you 're hungry. There ain't been many people up over our trail so far, but there 's never a 'tenderfoot' arrived here yet who has n't brought an appetite with him that I 'd match against a timber-wolf."

As they entered the cabin he said:

"Make yourselves comfortable, fellows. You can lie down and stretch your legs in the bunks there, if you want to."

"Thanks, Neal," said Archie. "I had n't thought much about it since the procession moved up out of the bushes, but I really believe I *am* tired."

During the preparation of the meal, and while the party was at table, the matter which was of greatest interest to all was so thoroughly discussed that by the time dinner was ended, a full and satisfactory understanding had been arrived at.

"If these leads are half as rich as you seem to think they are," remarked Archie, "you 're mighty generous with us; and whether they are or not, we 've reason to feel grateful for your splendid offer."

"Yes," added Harvey, "I 'll be satisfied with anything at all. I have n't expected much (I never do from a gold mine). The trip up here, and the 'dress-parade,' and the dinner are enough to pay for the trouble. If I only could have seen Brodie make the high dive, I 'd be willing to trade my interest. You must show me the place where he did the flop," and he laughed in gleeful imagination of the scene Ken had described.

"Well," retorted Neal, "I recommend that you wait a bit before you go to trading off your property. After you 've taken a peep around, you 'll be better able to tell how you like the prospects. We need n't be in any hurry this afternoon, though. We 'll sit here and rest and visit for a while, and then we 'll stroll over towards the tunnel. There 's another day coming, to-morrow."

"Say, Neal!" exclaimed Ken suddenly. "Do you know we 've made a blunder? We 've allowed Brodie and his crowd to go away without making them tell how they found the way to

get here, and where the trail down the cliff leads from! You remember we thought there was n't a possibility of any one's coming by the ledge Brodie discovered, after you blew away the approach!"

"Sure enough, Ken! At the last minute I forgot all about that!" returned Neal. "Well, maybe we 'll find time to explore it before long."

Ken made an inward resolution that he would be the one who would explore the trail; and, moreover, that he would do so the very next day.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A RAFTING EPISODE.— KEN'S DISCOVERY.

What with the lengthened dinner, the conversation, and the natural weariness of the new partners, the afternoon passed with but little attempt at sight-seeing, the party going only as far as the Telluride tunnel, where they saw enough to arouse the astonishment of both Campbell and Harvey.

"Well, Bob, what about that trade you were offering a while ago?" said Neal, holding up his candle to the broad surface of the shining quartz, as they stood close against the breast at the inner end of the tunnel.

"Did I offer to trade?" said Harvey, in mimic horror. "I must have been talking about an interest I 've got in another mine over the range. I 'm not offering any trades since dinner, anyway. Did you say the other lead is as good as this one, Neal?"

Neal smiled as he winked at Archie, saying: "It 's pretty hard to tell about leads until you come to work 'em. We 'll give you a chance to look it over to-morrow."

At breakfast the next morning Ken announced that, if agreeable to all, he would like to put in part of the day hunting and exploring the upper trail. "I 've a great curiosity," he said. "There seems just enough of mystery about it to make me want to solve it. And then you know how anxious I 've always been to get a big-horn, and I 've never yet been within range."

"All right, Ken," said Neal. "Only, if you 're going up the cliff, be careful not to get into trouble. If you 're looking for any of Dave's kind of adventures, I don't believe you could get away, as he did, with nothing worse than a cold swim."

"I guess Ken will be all right. He 's different from me," said Phil. "He always gets the lay of the ground well fixed in his mind before he puts his foot on it."

"Your plan is to go over it first, and then size it up afterwards; eh, Phil? If 't was you that was going, I think I 'd follow you at a safe distance behind, just to keep my mind easy," retorted Neal, laughingly.

"I don't blame you for saying that, after the Gunnison trip," said Phil. "But the scare I had that day was the beginning of a new course for me. I 'll get to be as careful as any of you, after a while."

Ken took his rifle, a rope, and a leather strap;

placed some slices of bread and meat in a small pouch, which he fastened to his belt, and with a pleasant word to Campbell and Harvey, wishing them a day full of pleasure, started away toward the northwest corner of the plateau.

"Be sure to get back before dark!" Neal called after him. To which Ken answered, "Yes, I will."

"Now, then," said Neal, addressing Archie and Bob, "if you people feel that your nerves are strong enough this morning to stand the excitement, we 'll go all around the place. Are you ready?"

"Yes, bring on your excitement," replied Archie. "We 'll be firm as rocks."

"Which shall it be first, Dave? The Big-Horn or the ranche and the general surroundings?" Neal asked.

"The 'ranche' and the 'big-horn'!" said Harvey, with a chuckle. "Well, I 've seen better places for that sort of thing. Is it a tame sheep you 've got; and have you coaxed us up here to look over some kind of a silly stock-farm? Archie, we 've got to kick."

"Be quiet, Bob, and keep up your faith," returned Archie. "Maybe they 're only trying to get you into a *trade* this morning."

Dave laughed, and then replied to Neal:

"I think it might be better to show them around outside, first. Possibly the scenery would be a little tame after the Big-Horn."

"Scenery!" groaned Bob. "Rainbow tints and pet lambs! I would n't have thought it of Neal. Would you, Archie?"

Neal smiled in a superior way, and retorted: "High altitude sometimes has a curious effect on delicate people. Archie, are you prepared to guarantee the pulse and heart-beats of your chum? Maybe this is going to be too strong for him."

"O, he 'll be quiet, soon. I vouch for him," returned Archie.

"Well, it 's your risk, and if you 're prepared to take it, we 'll move. Come on."

We need not follow the party over ground that is partly familiar to the reader, and need only state that before the day was half over, both Archie and Bob gave frequent expression to their amazement and delight. There was one little accident,— which happily, had no serious result, and which was owing to Harvey's boisterous interest in the scene of the "jumpers" raid.

The party having boarded the raft, paused as they approached the cliff, while Phil pointed out the features.

"And they threw all their shooting-irons into

the lake, right here, eh?" said Bob. He glanced down as he spoke, into the clear, glassy depth.

"Why, I believe I see a rifle down there now!" he cried, leaning over and peering into the water. As he spoke, his foot slipped from the smooth log, and with a great splash and a shout he went down.

"He can't swim!" shouted Archie. "We'll have to save him!"

He rose in a moment, and instantly both Dave and Phil plunged in and grasped him by the arms, holding him until the others assisted him back upon the raft.

When he recovered from the sneezing and sputtering occasioned by his sudden bath, he ejaculated, "Well, I'm not sorry I had the experience! I can understand Brodie's sensations perfectly! And, jiminy! What a shiver he got after his five or ten minutes of it! When I learn to swim, I won't practice here."

"Why, I thought you took the header intentionally, so as to get that rifle you saw," said Neal.

"Well," Bob answered, quickly, "if the other boys had n't held me back, I 'd have got it too. It was a Remington 45–90, and a better gun than mine!"

Harvey had to submit to Neal's banter during the rest of the day, and notwithstanding he was

a little chagrined, he took it all in the very best nature. After they arrived at the cave, however, and both the new partners had succeeded in scraping some beautiful nuggets from the dirt, all thought of the accident was, for the time being, forgotten.

At noon, when, jubilant and hungry, they were returning to camp, they were just stepping from the raft when they heard a distant shout; and, looking far up the cliff, saw Ken wending his way downward with a good-sized burden upon his back.

"Ken's got a sheep," said Neal. "And I'm glad, because it 'll do him so much good; besides, the mutton is n't bad to have."

Preparation of the noonday meal was an easy task under three willing pairs of hands. Phil was the third assistant, and it gratified him immensely to hear Neal say that he was progressing so well in the culinary art that he would soon be able to do as well as any of them.

Dinner was almost ready when Ken arrived; and he at once received the congratulations of all over the half of a fine young big-horn ram which he brought. At the meal he gave an account of his hunt, and also told the result of his exploration for the trail.

"I had a theory," Ken said, "that northwest-

"He went down with a great splash."

ward somewhere along the cliff I would find a pass that would let me through to the west side; and that 's just what I did find. I think it 's about a mile and a half from here. I followed it clear through to the west slope, and it was at a place about half a mile up the cañon that I got my sheep. I left him right there, and went on for nearly an hour, I think, before it opened so that I could have a view of the great *mesa*,* over to the west.

"When I reached the end of the gorge, I found a well-marked trail that ran northward along the slope; and, as I was out on a journey of discovery I followed it, and in half an hour I came to a camp. There was nobody about, and it had a deserted look, although it was quite newly made, too. There was a sort of a crib of freshly cut logs, and a top covering of old canvas. The provisions were very low, and I found several empty whisky bottles.

"Right close by there was an open-cut on a vein. I brought a piece of rock, Neal. Do you think there is anything in it? I thought it looked just a little like telluride."

He took a piece of quartz from his pocket and handed it to Neal, who examined it closely.

*The Spanish word for table-land, universally used in the Southwest.

"Yes," he said at length. "I think there's tellurium in it. I should say that our late visitors had a claim which might turn out rather well. I suppose there was n't any one among the whole half dozen who knew a good piece of ore from a bad one. We can put it away, and sometime when Dave's furnace is hot, maybe he 'll make a test of it."

"It seems to me almost too bad that those men could n't get the benefit of what really belongs to them," said Ken, musingly. "A real stroke of good luck might do more than anything else to bring about a change in the characters of all of them."

"I think we will run across some of them, sooner or later," said Neal; "and if they seem disposed to brace up, and the stuff proves to be good, perhaps we may feel warranted in telling them about it. It would be a first-class job, Ken, as you say, if we could make six law-abiding, honest men out of these rascals."

Harvey laid his fork down and leaned his elbow on the table, gazing fixedly at Neal. At length he said: "Say! you duffers here make up a combination that gives odds to anything I 've ever backed up yet. You locate a gold bonanza that, for promise, breaks all records, and it don't 'phase' you; you put up a paralyzing fight with

a lot of cutthroat jumpers, and in the very same act you offer the gang sweet religious counsel, and tell 'em to go in peace and sin no more; and now, if you 're not actually proposing an active missionary campaign! . . . .

"As I 've said before, it 's not a bit in my line, and I don 't feel able to *savvy* it altogether. The law is good enough for me. But there 's one thing I *can* catch on to, and that is, that you 're about the best crowd of fellows I ever got mixed up with, and I want to shake hands all round, just to show that I like you, even if I don 't understand your style."

"Thank you, Bob," replied Neal. "Maybe the 'campaign' won 't get up any very lively hustle after all. But if it works out along our lines we 'll be fair rivals, and we 'll give you a chance to see whether the 'missionary' plan stands any show in a race with the 'majesty of the law.'"

Campbell and Harvey remained a week at camp, and before they left, the plans were all matured for the prosecution of active work on the mines, and upon a large scale.

CHAPTER XXV.

FOUR YEARS LATER.—RETURN OF THE WANDERERS.

Four years have passed since the happenings narrated in the foregoing chapters; and it is a beautiful October morning in the city of Denver. At the Union Depot, where the through train from the East is reported a little behind-time, two young men of fine bearing are walking up and down the platform, conversing in a happy, and yet expectant manner.

They are unmistakably gentlemen, which fact is indicated, not so much by their erect and easy bearing, and the modish cut of their garments, as by the intelligent refinement which their faces express, and such fragments of conversation as we are able to overhear.

As we regard the two faces more closely, we become aware that they seem curiously familiar; familiar, yet almost strange, through the utter contrast between these, their present surroundings and make-up, and the locality and garb which were theirs when we last saw them. Then, too,

the few added years have replaced some portion (however slight), of former boyishness with just a trace of the gravity of manhood. A remark of the younger may give us a last clue to their identity.

"I wonder, Ken, whether the boys will dawn upon us in London tweeds or the newest stunning creations of a Parisian tailor? After trotting over the globe for a whole year, Dave and Neal will have been compelled, from actual necessity, to adopt European fashions."

Ken laughed at this speech, and answered:

"That 's an odd thought of yours, Phil, but I presume you are not far from right, either. I can hardly conjure up a picture of Neal, though, in a suit of Continental cut. I make the prediction that his choice will be English; — neither will Dave be any more extreme than the circumstances have compelled."

"What a time they must have had!" returned Phil. "I 'm sure of one thing. I 'd be willing to wager my black saddle-horse that they have n't done a single thing in the ordinary, commonplace, 'regular tourist' style. They 're sure to have been original in their sight-seeing, and will have experiences to tell never dreamed of by other people."

"Here 's the train," exclaimed Ken, suddenly;

and they at once turned about and hurried to the other end of the platform.

Just as the train came to a stop, Phil and Ken stationed themselves near the rear end, knowing their friends would be in a sleeping-car; and, as the passengers began to pour forth, they eagerly scrutinized each face. They were taken by surprise, after all; for, Ken, feeling a slight tap on his shoulder, turned, gave an exclamation, and instantly he and Phil were shaking hands in the warmest manner with two quite distinguished-looking gentlemen.

After the first greetings, each grasped a traveling-bag, and Phil led the way toward the carriage-stand, where, beckoning to the liveried driver of what was evidently an elegant private turn-out, he seated his three friends and took his place beside them.

"I shall drive home, William," he said; "you may take the trolley-car and reach there ahead of us."

As the beautiful pair sprang forward in their eagerness to be moving, Dave asked:

"Why, where did you get such an educated taste in horse-flesh, Phil? Those grays are fit for the Shah of Persia."

"Do you know," said Neal, "I had a kind

of half-crazy idea that we should find you waiting for us with Sancho and a camp outfit?"

"Well, my dear fellow," said Ken, with a jolly laugh, "I 'd like to ask what you expected to do with this sort of wardrobe in camp?"

"Just the same as I should with the rest of my old clothes. And I don't believe I think half as much of 'em, either," answered Neal. "We got these things in Paris. We had to have something; and I said to Dave, we 'd go the whole figure, just to get the experience, and find out how they felt. If you 've got a brown woolen shirt and a pair of duck trousers at home, I 'll trade even with you, when we get there. It 'll be worth the full price of the traveling experience just to get back and put on some clothes I can feel comfortable in."

"But, really now, fellows, don't Neal look swell?" asked Dave, as his eyes glanced over the fine figure of his chum.

"For that matter," answered Ken, "you both look swell enough to have just emerged from the glamour and influence of a European court." But his gaze rested longest upon Neal, who, indeed, was very pleasant to look at.

They were four fine looking fellows. Phil, with his olive complexion and dark, wavy hair; Ken,

with his brown eyes and mustache and clear skin; and Dave, with features of somewhat more rugged mold, but with marks of strength and force in every lineament. Neal was by far the handsomest of the four. Phil and Ken, as they looked at him, doubted if they had ever seen a finer looking man. His year of absence from the winds and snows of the Rockies had served to give a somewhat refined cast to his always striking face; and his perfect-fitting dark clothes set off to perfection his six feet of stalwart manliness.

"He 's shaved off his blonde mustache," thought Ken; "and he 's immensely handsomer without it. His profile is perfectly Grecian. With an education I believe that Neal, with his common sense, good understanding, and fine presence, would have been a power in the world."

"Where are you taking us to, Phil?" asked Dave, after they had been riding eastward for some time. "This must be Capitol Hill where we are now, is n't it? Things have changed so here in four years, I don't recognize anything."

"Yes, this is the Hill," said Ken, answering for Phil. "Do you see the large house yonder, which stands by itself?"

"The red stone one, with the wide grounds,

the trees, and the lodge? It reminds me a little of some of the English baronial country seats."

"It 's our new home," said Ken. "Phil, his mother, Lucy, and I: we all live here together."

"Whew!" cried Dave. "In one of the few letters of Lucy's which did n't get lost she told of your being all together, and said there was a house being built; but I did n't look for a royal palace," he added, as the carriage began to wind among the trees within the inclosure.

It is, perhaps, time to announce that Ken had been married to Dave's sister Lucy for more than a year, and that it was shortly after the wedding that Dave and Neal departed on their world-wanderings.

As the horses stopped underneath the *porte-cochère*, a tall, beautiful woman, standing in the doorway, called:

"O, Davie, brother!" and, as he quickly alighted and sprang to the steps, her arms went around his neck.

"Now, fellows!" cried Phil, when their friends had been ushered into the reception-room, "your own apartments are all ready for you — have been ever since the house was furnished, and will be, always, and at any time. The entire establishment is at your disposal, and we 're all going to

insist that you take possession of it precisely as though you had come back to the cabin at the Big-Horn. This merely is a larger one than that, and has more plate-glass and shine about it — but what else? We 're all perfectly happy here; but so we were up there, and we all four have as much interest in this house as we had in the cabin. It was built on the *community* plan, anyway."

"We had a dispute as to who should hold the title," said Ken, "and it finally was settled on me, against my will. When I 'm tired of it, I 'll pass it on; and when you 've been all over it, we 'll ask you later for your opinion."

"Yes," said Phil. You ought to be competent judges now. "I have n't yet been over the water, but the idea I 've formed of it is, that Europe consists entirely of houses. And of course you saw them all."

Dave and Neal both joined in a hearty laugh, Neal exclaiming:

"It 's been a standing joke with us for a good while, that probably no two men ever traveled around the world before, and saw (or at least noticed) as few houses as we. Dave will tell you about it."

At this moment Mrs. Wentworth and Lucy — or Mrs. Carter — entered. Mrs. Wentworth was

"He quickly alighted and sprang to the steps."

no stranger to any of the boys, so that the greetings were warm and without any restraint whatever.

"Now what is it Dave is going to tell about?" asked Lucy. "We want to hear everything; don't we, Mrs. Wentworth?"

"Indeed we do, and we insist on not being left out," replied that happy and proud-looking lady, who, in appearance, might almost have been Phil's elder sister, instead of his mother, and whom he resembled surprisingly. "Dave can tell us at breakfast," she added, as a spruce and dignified butler appeared with the announcement of service.

"Phil was saying," Dave began, when they were at table in the spacious dining-room whose windows commanded a magnificent view of the distant snowy Range, "that Neal and I must have become authorities on houses after seeing so many abroad; and Neal said I would tell how it comes that we gave so little attention to buildings that we hardly know any more about them than when we went away.

"The fact of the matter is this: We started out to see the world: and we found out, almost as soon as we started, that both of us felt alike on one subject, which was a comparative indifference about cities and their inhabitants. We

realize that many would declare the cities to be the most important elements of the world, everywhere; but while we do not deny this, we simply say that the features which excited our interest were the stretches of country that lie between the cities: the great plains, the valleys, the deserts, and especially the mountains.

"Now if you want any information about mountains, or the people who live in them," he continued with a laugh, "we modestly believe we can gratify you. We did the Alps and the Pyrenees pretty thoroughly. The scenery, in parts, is great, and we found the people rather entertaining; but Neal thought the show for mineral was beneath contempt. We went over the Dovré Chain, and liked the Norwegians so much we hated to leave; then we swung down through the Carpathians and Balkans, getting more and more interested, and running across peoples and ways of existence we never had dreamed of. We took in the Caucasus, and were enthusiastic about the district. Neal thinks when they begin to get civilized, the possibilities for mining there are large. . . .

"Then we went into the Himalayas, and Hindu-Kush; extended our acquaintance as much as we could with the Afghans and the Hill Tribes, and had to reluctantly admit that the

Rockies dwindled away pretty badly beside those peaks. We tried the Altai, and Neal gave some valuable pointers on hydraulic placer-mining to the Russian martinets in charge of the convict gangs (at least he said he did),'' and Dave winked at Phil. ''Then we crossed over to Japan: and what do you think?—we located a vein carrying tellurium and free gold on the side of sacred Fusiyama. We think the Japs are going to make great miners in a few years. Would n't wonder if they have the ore too.

''We inspected Cecil Rhodes's bonanzas in the Transvaal, and compared notes on the kind of labor the blacks do, there, as against the prehistoric methods of basket-and-ladder that we ran across in certain places down among the Peons in the Andes. . . .

''So you see, that 's the reason we did n't learn much about houses. We don't feel that we 've put in our time so badly, though, and if you know anybody who thinks he 's had a better time out of a year's travel, bring him in and we 'll argue with him.''

''But the best of all, Davie,'' exclaimed Neal, ''is the getting back home. The sight of you all is the greatest pleasure, and the view of the Range from here is as lovely as anything I remember. What news about the Telluride and

Big-Horn? Do they still hold out as well as ever? and have you ever regretted selling out the control for six millions?"

"No, indeed!" cried Phil and Ken both together.

"They are paying splendidly," said Ken — the Telluride seems a trifle ahead just now — but our price was good, even if the property should prove to be worth *sixty* millions; and besides, the dividends on the third we kept come along as regular as clockwork. We need n't lose any sleep if both mines 'play out' to-morrow."

"What about Archie and Bob?" Neal inquired.

"O! Have n't you heard?" cried Phil. "But of course you have n't. You know, they could n't get enough of politics; and in their cases matters work beautifully. Archie has been elected to Congress, and Bob is candidate for governor, with the chances first-class in his favor."

"Good!" cried Neal. "If only it don't spoil 'em, and I don't believe it will."

"And, O, say Neal! Tell about Brodie, Ken!" said Phil.

Ken told how one day nearly a year ago they had found Brodie hard at work for one of the mining companies; and learning upon inquiry

that he had been a good, steady worker ever since he entered their employ, he told him about the excellent assay the boys got from the ore of his abandoned claim.

"He and his chums managed to get capital to work with, and their property is turning out first-class. They say at least three or four of the crowd are there, and that they all are good, well-behaved fellows. I told Harvey about it. It amused him, and he says we 've won," said Ken.

And thus the conversation ran along. But we cannot prolong the account of it.

* * * * * * *

Neal and Dave still continue to make (or at least to call) the Denver house their home, but during the greater part of the time are absent in the mountains and elsewhere, looking after their various enterprises,— in some of which Phil and Ken are interested. The latter two devote the larger part of their attention to guarding and protecting the property of all four of the friends.

"Perhaps it did n't require any brains to get our wealth," Phil observed, "but we don't intend ever to have it said about any of our set that we had n't brains enough to keep it."

THE END.

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